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REBELS OR REDEEMERS ?

G A N D H I

BY

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CHAPTER VIII

AS A NON-CO-OPERATOR (1918-1922)

Gandhi had hardly begun to feel his way towards recovery when the recommendations of the Rowlatt Committee came as a shock to him. It appeared as if for her war services India was to get, not freedom promised in 1917 by His Majesty's Government, but fresh fetters on her wounded body. In a small meeting at the *Ashram* it was decided to offer *satyagraha*, if Rowlatt recommendations were translated into an enactment. Those present signed a pledge. A *Satyagraha Sabha* was founded at Bombay, with Gandhi as President, and the work of preparation began in right earnest. The government did not let grass grow under its feet. In the matter of political advancement of India it has consistently followed Dr. Hanneman's principle; and in order to obtain high potency,

has always diluted with the spirit of plentiful repression, its homoeopathic doses of reform administered at long intervals. The spirit of repression is always given in plenty; the salt of reform is administered in microscopic doses only when it can no more be safely withheld, and that, too, after a thorough, prolonged and tiresome repertory. The war was over; India, in the words of Lord Hardinge, had bled herself white for England's sake. She had unstintedly sacrificed, for England, the flower of her manhood and emptied her slender purse, the mainstay of her starving millions. Although in a fit of gratitude and at the time menaced by the Irish rebellion at home and Muslim disaffection in India, British Ministers had promised her responsible government, it was now to be preceded by the perpetuation of the Defence of India Act—a war measure—and other noxious laws recommended by the Rowlatt Committee. The Bill was soon published and in spite of the telling criticism of Sastri and other leaders in the Imperial Legislative Council and outside, it was, with the help of official votes, passed into law.

Gandhi was, at the time, in Madras as the guest of Rajagopalachari and Kasturiranga Iyengar. The trio were discussing various plans of fighting the Black Act, when one morning while he "was still in that twilight condition between sleep and consciousness," suddenly the idea broke upon him, as if in a dream, that *satyagrah* should commence with an act of national self-purification in the shape of a *hartal*, fast and prayer throughout the country. His hosts and other colleagues fell in with this idea. March 30, 1919 was fixed for the purpose and on 23rd March, 1919, Gandhi issued a brief appeal. As the time was short, the date was subsequently altered to the 6th April, 1919. The whole of India responded as one man and every town and village observed complete *hartal* on this day, every business having been completely suspended for twenty-four hours.

The news of the change of date could not reach Delhi in time and it observed the *hartal*, as was originally announced, on the 30th March, 1919. The *hartal* was the completest Delhi has ever witnessed and so was the Hindu-Muslim unity. For the first

time in the history of British rule in India did a Hindu, Swami Shraddhanand, preach to a Mohammadan congregation from the pulpit of the Juma Masjid of Imperial Delhi. A huge but peaceful procession started to parade the main thoroughfares. This was too much for the authorities to bear; they stopped the procession and opened fire, causing a number of casualties. Even in the face of this provocation, the people remained peaceful. Shraddhanand urgently summoned Gandhi to Delhi. As he was proceeding, the government arrested Gandhi at Palwal and sent him back to Bombay under police escort. The news of his arrest spread like wild fire and people throughout the country became furious. Except for some violence at Bombay, Ahmedabad, Viramgam and Nadiad, the *hartal* on the 6th April, 1919, was perfectly non-violent.

In the Punjab, the watch-dogs of law and order smelt wide-spread sedition and stirred government to frenzy. Amritsar was given over to General Dyer for his feast of blood. The *Baisakhi* festival was at hand; immense concourse of pilgrims had assembled and, on

the 13th April, was holding a meeting in Jallianwalla Bagh, outside the city.

“The crowd was peaceful and numbered many women and children. The night before, General Dyer had sent out an order forbidding public meetings, but no one had heard about it. The General, however, came to Jallianwalla Bagh with his machine-guns and without warning opened fire on the defenceless mass of people. The firing lasted about 10 minutes, till the ammunition was used up. As the grounds were surrounded by high walls, no one could escape. From five to six hundred Hindus were killed, and a much larger number wounded. There was no one to care for the dead and wounded. As the result of the massacre, martial law was proclaimed, and a reign of terror spread over Punjab. Aeroplanes threw bombs on the unarmed crowds. The most honourable citizens were dragged to court, flogged, and forced to crawl on their knees, and subjected to the most shocking indignities. It was as if a wind of madness swept the English rulers.” *

Gandhi did not expect to lead his people through a path of roses; he expected thousands of innocent Indians, men, women, and children, to fall a prey to British bayonets, which “the war to end war” had failed to turn into plough shares, but he was not prepared to put up with the least exhibition of violence or indiscipline

* Rolland p. 52.

from his own countrymen. A revolutionary leader would have exploited the effervescence of the people, but Gandhi gave it a quietus by suspending *satyagraha* on the 18th April, 1919, and declared a penitential fast of three days for himself for being guilty of a "Himalayan miscalculation" in launching *satyagraha* without the means of preventing violence.

Gandhi now started the work of educating the people with regard to the meaning and inner significance of *satyagraha* by issuing leaflets, enrolling volunteers and addressing meetings. About this time, Omar Sobhani and Shanker Lal Banker, who controlled the *Young India*, placed it under Gandhi's editorship. The *Navajivan* was also offered to him. Since then, these two weeklies have been the bearers of Gandhi's message to his countrymen. Under his editorship, their circulation, at one time, rose to the neighbourhood of forty thousand each.

The Punjab atrocities, committed under the cloak of martial law, form one of the darkest chapters of British rule in India. The whole country expressed its abhorrence; even just-minded Englishmen were

horror-struck, but the reign of terror went through its full course unchecked and an Act of Indemnity was soon passed to draw a curtain over it. Gandhi was impatient to go to the Punjab, see things for himself and console the lacerated heart of the innocent Punjabi; but Sir Michael O'Dwyer would not let him enter his sacrosanct province on the pretext that his presence was likely to disturb the public peace, although he had helped the authorities to restore peace in Ahmedabad. One speech by Gandhi had such a marvellous effect on the people there, that the government felt justified in withdrawing martial law the same day or the day after ; but the white Nadir Shah of the Punjab spurned his co-operation. The Viceroy, in reply to Gandhi's request to visit the Punjab, also said, "Not yet." This order Gandhi could not disobey, for disobedience would have meant his arrest and deportation from the Province or incarceration; and in either case the people, whose feelings Gandhi wanted to soothe, would have been further excited.

At last, when the Punjab bureaucracy had got rid of its opponents by sending them

either to the gallows or to the jail, through farcical trials by specially constituted tribunals, that were not even an apology for a court of justice, Mr. C. F. Andrews managed to reach the Punjab. He sent heart-rending reports of the state of things there and pressed Gandhi urgently to join him. Gandhi sought the Viceroy's permission; the latter replied that Gandhi could go after the 17th October, 1919. Although some irate young Punjabis held Gandhi responsible for martial law and Jallianwalla Bagh which, they asserted, was due to his suspending *satyagraha*, and threatened him with assassination, the moment he entered Lahore he was received by a seething mass of humanity. Malaviyaji, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Swami Shraddhanand, who had preceded him, decided to boycott the Hunter Committee, appointed by the government to report on the administration of martial law in the province and asked P. Motilal Nehru, Messrs C. R. Das, Abbas Tyebji, M. R. Jayakar and Gandhi to hold an enquiry. By far, the greatest part of the work fell to Gandhi's lot. As Gandhi

“proceeded further and further with my enquiry,

into the atrocities that had been committed on the people, I came across tales of Government's tyranny and the arbitrary despotism of its officers such as I was hardly prepared for, and they filled me with deep pain. What surprised me then, and what still continues to fill me with surprise, was the fact, that a province, that had furnished the largest number of soldiers to the British Government during the War, should have taken all these brutal excesses lying down."*

The whole country, smarting under the Punjab wrong, demanded merely the recall of officers guilty of cold-blooded murders, but the government regarded it as a blow to its prestige. It was obviously to the government's interest to punish such officers and regain the confidence of the people; but it was not prepared even to accede to the request to treat them as only mad men and put them where they could do no damage. This created a gulf between the people and the government, which subsequent events widened year by year.

A second and more serious conflict arose between the Government and the people. During the war, Lloyd George and the Viceroy had, in deference to the united

*My Experiments With Truth, Vol. II. p. 527.

Indian Muslim demand, solemnly promised to let the Turks remain in Turkey in Europe and to leave unimpaired the Sultan's authority as Khalifa over the sacred lands of Islam. After England had won the war and Moslem help was no longer required, these pledges slipped out of memory and Turkey was treated like other enemies. Indian Mahomedans were in effervescence and started what is known as the *Khilafat* movement. The Hindus siezed this opportunity of realising their dream of a united India and stood by their Muslim compatriots. The peaceful and imposing *Khilafat* demonstration throughout the country on the 17th October, 1919, known as the *Khilafat* day, owed its success as much to the Hindu as to the Muslim. This was followed by the inauguration of the All-India Khilafat Conference at Delhi on the 24th November, 1919. Gandhi, the apostle of national unity, was invited to preside. The letter of invitation showed that cow-protection was also one of the questions to be considered. Gandhi did not like the *Khilafat* and the cow questions to be mixed up or considered in the

spirit of a bargain and suggested that they should be treated separately and decided on their own merits. Gandhi's argument prevailed and only the *Khilafat* question came up before the Conference. Still that great Muslim divine, who combined in himself burning religious fervour with patriotism of no mean order, the late Maulana Abdul Bari, said :

“ No matter whether the Hindus help us or not, the Musalmans ought, as the countrymen of the Hindus, out of regard for the latter's susceptibilities, to give up cow-slaughter.” *

And at one time it almost looked as if they would really put an end to it.

Gandhi did not allow the Punjab wrong either to be tacked on to the *Khilafat* question. The Conference called upon the people to take the *swadeshi* vow, Hasrat Mohani's amendment in favour of boycott of British goods having failed, chiefly because of Gandhi's opposition. It was in this meeting that Gandhi hit upon the idea and the word of non-co-operation. He said, that if the peace terms were unfavourable to the Musalmans they would stop all co-operation with the government. “ It is an inalienable

* My Experiments With Truth Vol. II. p. 533.

right of the people thus to withhold co-operation." They were not bound to retain government titles and honours, or to continue in government service. If the government should betray them in a great cause like the *Khilafat*, they could not do otherwise than non-co-operate.

The *Khilafat* Conference was soon followed by the 34th session of the Indian National Congress, held in Amritsar, the city consecrated with the blood of the Jallianwalla Bagh martyrs, under the presidentship of P. Motilal Nehru, that great patriot, who at immense sacrifice of his lucrative practice at the bar, had made the Punjab his headquarters in order to expose the brutalities perpetrated under martial law. The Government of India Act, 1919, based, not on the Congress-League Scheme of 1916, which sought automatically to speed up further reforms by creating deadlock and represented the unanimous demand of the country but on the Montagu-Chelmsford recommendations toned down by the Parliament, which appealed to no section of political India and which paved the way for irresponsible and

unsympathetic autocracy, sometimes parading in the garb of democracy and sometimes in its ugly nakedness, had passed through the houses of Parliament, and received the Royal Assent. The king, by his proclamation of 24th December, 1919, invited the peoples' co-operation and asked the Viceroy to pardon political offenders. The Congress was in session when the Punjab prisoners, the Ali brothers and other political convicts were let off, and in many cases they proceeded to Amritsar direct. Gandhi, ever ready to believe in the good faith of his opponents, saw in these measures a change of heart in the government and while confessing that the reforms were defective and inadequate advised his countrymen to accept them; but Tilak and Das held firmly to the view that they must be rejected. Fortunately, there was a compromise which increased Gandhi's responsibility. The Amritsar Congress appointed Gandhi as one of the trustees of the Jallianwalla Bagh Memorial for which he collected a substantial amount in no time. But what brought Gandhi in closer touch with the Congress and eventually led to his merging

his individuality in the Indian nation, was his appointment, at Amritsar, to remodel the constitution of the Congress in consultation with Sjt. N. C. Kelkar and I. B. Sen. They unanimously drew up a constitution which Gandhi regards "with a certain measure of pride". He holds that the mere fact of working out this constitution "would bring us *Swaraj*."

The Mahomedans were so alarmed over the attitude of the Allies towards the *Khilafat* question, that they met again in the second Khilafat Conference in December, 1919, in Amritsar and held a third conference in Bombay only about two months later, in which they violently arraigned Great Britain's policy. Gandhi saw a terrific storm brewing and tried to break its violence. The peace conditions imposed on Turkey were announced with a viceregal message on May 14, 1920, admitting that they were disappointing but advising the Mahomedans to accept the inevitable. This was soon followed by the white-washing report of the Hunter Committee and executions of Bugga and Ratan Chand whom the people regarded as innocent

victims of martial law. The country was now seething with discontent; the Indian Mohammadans' loyalty to the government, which had, in internal matters, stood by them even in respect of claims regarded by the other communities as unjust and extravagant, came into conflict with their fealty to Islam and they chose the latter. The Hindus supported them both out of sympathy and on account of their smarting under the Punjab wrong. On the 28. May, 1920, the Khilafat Committee adopted non-co-operation, which was ratified on 30. June, 1920, by the Moslem Conference at Allahabad. Gandhi wrote an open letter to the Viceroy saying:

"The only course open to me is either in despair to sever all connection with British rule or, if I still retain faith in the inherent superiority of the British Constitution, to adopt such means as will rectify the wrong done and thus restore confidence. I have not lost faith in the superiority of the British Constitution, and it is because I believe in it that I have advised my Moslem friends to withdraw their support from Your Excellency's Government, and advised the Hindus to join them."

The reply was the Viceroy's speech, in which he characterised non-co-operation as "the most foolish of all foolish schemes." At

last, Gandhi announced on the 28th July, 1920, that non-co-operation would be launched on the 1st August, to be preceded by fasting and prayer on 31st July.

"He had no fear of governmental fury, but he feared the fury of the populace, and he bent every effort to have order and discipline reign within the Indian ranks. He declared: Effective non-co-operation depends upon complete organization. Disorderliness comes from anger. There must be no violence. Violence means retrogression in our case, and useless waste of innocent lives. Above every thing else, there must be complete order."*

On the appointed day he wrote to the Viceroy surrendering his decorations and titles and hoping that the Viceroy would call a conference of the leaders and in consultation with them do justice. He wrote:

"It is not without a pang that I return the Kaisar-i-Hind Gold Medal granted to me by your predecessor for my humanitarian work in South Africa, the Zulu War Medal, granted in South Africa for my services as officer in charge of the Indian Volunteer Ambulance Corps in 1906, and the Boer War Medal for my services as assistant superintendent of the Indian Volunteer Stretcher-bearer Corps during the Boer War of 1899-1900."

After referring to the Punjab horrors and

* Rolland p. 60.

the government's back-sliding in the matter of *Khilafat*. he says:

"I can retain neither respect nor affection for a Government which has been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend its immorality. The Government must be moved to repentance. I have, therefore, ventured to suggest non-co-operation, which enables those who wish to dissociate themselves from the Government and which, if unattended by violence, must compel the Government to retrace its steps and undo its wrongs."

Poet Tagore returned his Knighthood with one of the most cutting letters that a king must ever have received; so did Subramania Iyer, the Ex-Judge. Hundreds of noted Indians followed suit, surrendering titles, abandoning courts, and emptying schools and colleges.

The Gujrat Political Conference met under the chairmanship of the venerable Abbas Tyebji who, along with Vallabhbhai Patel, was in favour of non-co-operation. Taking advantage of this support, Gandhi placed the non-co-operation resolution before the Conference and had it carried by an overwhelming majority. The All-India Congress Committee now had to hold a special session of the Congress in Calcutta, in September 1920,

under the chairmanship of Lala Lajpat Rai to deliberate on this question. Gandhi proposed the adoption of non-co-operation with a view to obtaining redress of the Punjab and *Khilafat* wrongs. Sjt. Vijayaraghavachari and Pt. Moti Lal Nehru thought that the absence of *Swaraj* was the biggest wrong the country was labouring under; and that non-co-operation should be directed against it. Gandhi readily accepted the amendment and the resolution was passed.

Gandhi and Shaukat Ali now toured the country and received tremendous ovations everywhere. He found his movement could subdue "mobocracy", the greatest danger menacing India. He holds, "If India has to achieve her freedom by violence, let it be by the disciplined violence named war" and not by unorganised mob-violence; "we must evolve order out of chaos, introduce peoples' law instead of mob law." While curbing violent elements, Gandhi stimulates the hesitating to take a decisive step. He says :

"Never has anything been done on this earth without direct action. What was the larger "symbiosis" that Buddha and Christ preached? Gentleness and love. Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the enemy's camp

and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew down curses from heaven upon the hypocrites and Pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action."

Disappointed with the attitude of the British government, Gandhi addressed fervent appeals to the English people, recognising their bravery and saying:

"I know that you will not yield to justice and reason, you will gladly yield to bravery....I know you would not mind if we could fight and wrest the sceptre from your hands. You know we are powerless to do that; for you have ensured our incapacity to fight an open and honourable battle. Bravery on the battle-field is thus impossible for us. Bravery of the soul still remains open to us."

Standing as Gandhi does for an all round liberty for India—political, economic, mental and moral—in November, 1920, he founded at Ahmedabad the National University of Gujrat in order to liberate the mind, shake off the yoke of European culture, and create a united India. This university translates into action Gandhi's ideal of Indian education. Gandhi holds that a

"systematic study of Asiatic culture is no less essential than the study of western sciences. The vast

treasures of Sanskrit and Arabic, Persian and Pali and Magadhi, have to be ransacked to discover wherein lies the source of strength for the nation.....The ideal is not merely to feed on or repeat the ancient cultures, but to build a new culture based on the traditions of the past and enriched by the experiences of later times. The ideal is a synthesis of the different cultures that have come to stay in India, that have influenced Indian life, and that, in their turn, have themselves been influenced by the spirit of the soil. This synthesis will naturally be of the *swadeshi* type, where each culture is assured its legitimate place, and not of the American pattern, where one dominant culture absorbs the rest and where the aim is not toward harmony, but toward an artificial and forced unity."

Vocational training is also given in order to foster a spirit of independence. Gandhi hopes to organise, gradually, higher schools that will spread education broadcast throughout the towns and

"filter it down to the masses, so that...ere long the suicidal cleavage between the educated and the uneducated will be bridged. And as an effect of giving an industrial education to the genteel folks and a literary education to the industrial classes, the unequal distribution of wealth and social discontent will be considerably checked."

The Nagpur Congress of 1920 unanimously

confirmed the non-co-operation resolution of the Calcutta special session, with some slight changes effected by Gandhi at the instance of Lala Lajpat Rai and C. R. Das. The constitution drafted by Gandhi, setting up a net-work of Congress organisations in every nook and corner of the country, limiting the number of delegates and establishing an executive on the cabinet system for day-to-day work, was also accepted without a division. But keen discussion centred round the goal of the Congress and the method by which it was to be reached. The older school, headed by Malaviyaji and Jinnah, was for *swaraj* within the British Empire, to be attained by constitutional means. The younger generation wanted complete independence, to be achieved by any means, peaceful or violent. But Gandhi stood for *swaraj*, within the Empire, if possible, and without, if necessary, by peaceful and legitimate means. Gandhi had the day; his draft was accepted by an overwhelming majority. Resolutions about Hindu-Muslim unity, the removal of untouchability and *khadi* were also passed. Thus, the Congress adopted the

whole body of principles Gandhi lives for. From this day onwards, Gandhi and the Congress became synonymous terms; he ceased to be an individual and became the living emblem of the Indian nation. Hence-forth his biography is the history of India in the making.

The objects—the creed, as it is called—and the constitution of the Indian National Congress had, during thirty five years, undergone a number of changes, but never so drastic as in 1920. Up till that year, the Congress was, more or less, an annual Christmas engagement of the English-educated Indians who met to pass in review the acts and omissions of the British administration of India, claim certain reforms in the name of the nation and sink back into sublime inactivity for twelve months, though leaders like Tilak, Gokhale and Annie Besant had striven to bring the masses into the Congress fold and by sustained effort to re-awaken, in them, patriotism, love of liberty and keen political sense so as to befit them for self-government. The new constitution now made the Congress a living force, pulsating with the life of the people, and put it on the way

to realise the hope expressed in the circular issued to call the first Congress at Poona in Christmas, 1885, by the seventeen social and intellectual leaders of society, who met at Madras, late in December, 1884, after the annual convention of the Theosophical Society:

“Indirectly this conference will form the germ of a Native Parliament and, if properly conducted, will constitute, in a few years, an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is still wholly unfit for any form of representative institutions.”

The constitution, adopted in December, 1920, was soon in full working order. The All-India Congress Committee with its cabinet, the Working Committee, provincial, district, tehsil and local Committees in each town, village or group of villages, were formed on the basis of adult franchise qualified by payment of four annas to the Congress fund. Steps were also taken to form a band of national workers called the Indian National Service. A fund of a crore of rupees was raised in memory of Tilak. All this took no time for Gandhi to achieve. The non-co-operation programme was vigorously pushed through, with marvellous non-violence.

Troubles like the agrarian uprisings in the United Provinces had little or no relation to the non-co-operation movement. In the Punjab, disputes about the control of Sikh temples had been going on between the Akalis and the Udasis. The former now adopted Gandhi's non-violent weapon and undertook peaceful marches to their temples, bearing, patiently, insults and injuries at the hands of the police and the temple guards. In February, 1921, the voluntary march of two hundred unarmed Akali resisters, bent upon gaining control of the *Gurudwara* at Nankana Sahib, to a cruel death at the hands of the mercenary Pathans employed by the Mahant, gave a thrill of martyrdom to the whole nation.

Liquor trade in India has always been the monopoly of the government. The income from it was increasing day by day. As a step towards national self-purification, Gandhi asked the people to give up the use of liquors, prohibited both by Hinduism and Islam, the two great religions of India. The appeal was so effective that the government was alarmed. The sequel cannot be described better than in the words of Romain Rolland:

"In March, 1921, the repression began, and it became more and more oppressive as the months passed. The Government justified its intervention by the necessity of protecting the liquor dealers from the fury of the mobs. This was not the first time for European civilization and alcohol to march hand in hand. The volunteer non-co-operation organizations were dissolved. A law was made prohibiting seditious meetings. In certain provinces the police had been given *carte blanche* in suppressing the movement, which was called 'revolutionary and anarchistic'. Thousands of Indians were arrested, and some of India's most respected citizens were summarily jailed and brutalized. Naturally, this procedure stirred up bad blood, and here and there people and the constables clashed. Some houses were burned and people wounded." *

A rank revolutionary would have fanned the popular fury to flames and set the whole country ablaze, but Gandhi fasted and prayed and preached in order to keep violence down. In the end of March, 1921, he successfully pleaded against civil disobedience before the All-India Congress Committee at Bezwada on the ground that the people were not yet prepared to wield such a dangerous weapon. Instead of civil disobedience, Gandhi launched a fervid campaign for unity and social reform.

* Rolland p. 85.

British hold on India was established by Clive and Hastings by taking sides in the contests for power between a decadent Muslim empire on the one side and the rising Hindu princes and Muslim governors on the other. Hindu-Muslim schisms strengthen the British hold and serve as a justification for it. Gandhi said:

"As soon as we show unity, the British will step out; they are sensible people. To paraphrase the saying of a rough British protagonist of the commoners' struggle in England: 'If we Indians could only spit in unison, we would form a puddle big enough to drown three hundred thousand Englishmen'." *

To unite in true friendship, he made frevent appeals, from the press and from the platform, to the Hindus and the Muslims, the relations between whom were embittered continually by false prejudices and baseless suspicions which the policy of the British government did little to remove. He also called upon the rich Parsi merchants, "tainted with the spirit of Rockfeller," to stand by the side of their Hindu and Muslim countrymen.

The first and foremost item on Gandhi's social reform programme was the removal

* Hall p. 437.

of untouchability. He regards untouchability as a dark stain on the fair face of Hinduism, for which, not the religion, but its professors are responsible. Gandhi so keenly feels the iniquity perpetrated on the untouchables that he would give up Hinduism which, to him, is the very breath of his life, if it can be proved that it imposes untouchability. India's wrongs, he feels, are justified by her treatment of the untouchables.

"If the Indians have become the *pariahs* of the empire, it is retributive justice, meted out to us by a just God...Should we, Hindus, not wash our blood-stained hands before we ask the English to wash theirs? So long as Hindus wilfully regard untouchability as part of their religion, so long *Swaraj* is impossible of attainment."

He advised the untouchables to non-co-operate with the Hindus. He presided at their conference on April 13 and 14 at Ahmedabad, succeeded in instilling self-confidence in them and filled them with his burning ideal; and by the end of April, untouchability was on the wane. Even Brahmans enrolled among his helpers; a young Brahman of nineteen became a street-sweeper to live and work among the untouchables. He asked the Hindus to

“realise that, if they wish to offer successful non-co-operation against the Government, they must make common cause with the untouchables, for non-co-operation against the foreign oppressor presupposes co-operation between the different sections forming the Indian nation.”

He equally interested himself in the cause of the Indian prostitutes, “the fallen sisters,” as he called them. About a deputation of a hundred prostitutes he received, he says:

“The two hours I spent with these sisters is a treasured memory to me. I bowed my head in shame before these hundred sisters and their degradation. All of us men must hang our heads in shame as long as there is a single woman whom we dedicate to our lust. I will far rather see the race of man extinct than that we should become less than beasts by making the noblest of God’s creation the object of our lust. Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible none is so degrading, so shocking, or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity.”

The cause of women in general is no less dear to him. He says:

“I loathe and detest child-marriages. I shudder to see a child widow. I have never known a grosser superstition. I make bold to say that the climate has absolutely nothing to do with puberty. What does bring about untimely puberty is the mental and moral

atmosphere surrounding family life. The children are betrothed when they are infants or even babes in arms. The dress and food of the children are also aids to stimulating the passions."

He calls upon women to forget their bodies, the objects of masculine desire, and take to public life, renounce luxury and ease, and vie with men in suffering for the motherland. In silent suffering the Indian woman surpasses man. She can have no fear for her honour for

"one who knows how to die need never fear... Woman is not the weaker sex, but the better half of humanity, the nobler of the two; for even today it is the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humanity, faith, and knowledge. Woman's intuition has often proved truer than man's arrogant assumption of knowledge."

Women came out of their seclusion, threw off the veil and fought, side by side with men, the non-violent battle for their country. Many distinguished women courted arrest and imprisonment under the Congress flag.

Non-co-operation, as a political weapon, had not been unknown in modern India. It was tried for the first time against British rule in 1812 in Benares as a protest against

certain taxes imposed by the British and regarded as unjust by the people; all the business remained suspended till the government yielded and repealed the taxes. Another attempt was made in Mysore in 1830; what happened is thus described by the British representative:

“The population left the villages, ceased all work in the fields, drove out the officials and refused to pay taxes in any form whatever. But no excesses occurred anywhere and no one had recourse to arms. The people assembled in the jungles and maintained themselves there with all sorts of provisions brought from the villages at night-time. The various measures by the help of which the natives defend themselves against the abuses of the Government are familiar to the population. The most frequent and most effective means is to refrain completely from any participation in administrative business.” *

But it was under Gandhi that the movement became countrywide, received its true ethical and revolutionary importance and evolved its lofty philosophical system.

The movement was the hottest in the summer of 1921. At certain places “government’s brutally oppressive measures” led to

* Gandhi, the Holyman p. 131.

riots and bloodshed. In May, 1921, twelve thousand coolies went on strike in Assam tea gardens and were attacked by Gurkhas drafted by the government. Long strikes were organised in Eastern Bengal by railroad and steamship workers. Gandhi did his utmost to calm the effervescence and also had a long interview with Lord Reading.

On the 8th July, 1921, the All India Khilafat Conference met at Karachi and decided that no Muslim should serve in the army or assist in recruiting; it threatened to start civil disobedience and proclaim an Indian republic if the attitude of the British towards the *Khilafat* did not change by December.

The All-India Congress Committee, sitting at Bombay on 28th July, decided to boycott the Prince of Wales, whose visit in the coming cold weather was announced and declared the boycott of all foreign materials to become effective by 30. September.

In August, 1921, Gandhi endorsed the burning of foreign cloth and huge bonfires were made of it in every town. Tagore and Andrews protested. To the latter's suggestion to give foreign cloth to the poor, Gandhi

replied, "It would be wrong to give these poisonous goods, that were destroying India, to the poor, for they too have their sense of honour" An intellectual universalist like Tagore could not enter into the depths of the religious feelings of Gandhi, an emotional universalist; he was shocked at the narrowness of Gandhi's asceticism and renunciation, more akin to the negative Buddhistic than to the positive Brahmanical ideal; he was alarmed at the blind faith the people placed in Gandhi's words. To the poet

"an outside influence seemed to be bearing down on them, grinding them and making one and all speak in the same tone, follow in the same groove. Everywhere I was told that culture and reasoning power should abdicate, and blind obedience only reign. So simple it is to crush, in the name of some outward liberty, the real freedom of the soul."*

Gandhi's insistence on spinning and weaving made Tagore ask

"Is this the gospel of the new creative age? If large machinery constitutes a danger for the west, will not small machines constitute a greater danger for us?"

The exclusiveness of Gandhi's *swadeshi* called forth from the poet, the remark:

* Rolland, pp. 106-107,

The awakening of India is bound up in the awakening of the world. Every nation that tries to shut itself in violates the spirit of the new age.

But replied Gandhi:

"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible...But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them. Mine is not a religion of the prison-house. It has room for the least among God's creations. But it is proof against insolent pride of race, religion, or colour. We must not surrender our reason into anybody's keeping. Blind surrender to love is often more mi-chievous than forced surrender to the lash of the tyrant. There is hope for the slave of the brute, none for the slave of love.

When all about me are dying for want of food, the only occupation permissible for me is to feed the hungry. India is a house on fire. It is dying of hunger because it has no work to buy food with. India is growing daily poorer.* The circulation about her feet and legs has almost stopped. And if we do not take care, she will collapse altogether.

To a people famishing and idle the only acceptable

* Cf. W. H. Moreland, C. S. I., I. C. S. who states that the wages of labour in India were the same in 1911 as at the death of Akbar, while the purchasing power of the rupee had gone down seven times.

form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages. God created man to work for his food and said that those who ate without work were thieves. We must think of the millions who to-day are less than animals, almost in a dying state. Hunger is the argument that is drawing India to the spinning wheel.

The poet lives for the morrow, and would have us do like-wise. He presents to our admiring gaze the beautiful picture of the birds in the early morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky. Those birds had their day's food and soared with rested wings, in whose veins new blood had flowed the previous night. The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance. I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir.

Give them work that they may eat. 'Why should I, who have no need to work for food, spin?' may be the question asked. Because I am eating what does not belong to me. I am living on the spoliation of my countrymen. Trace the course of every coin that finds its way into your pocket, and you will realize the truth of what I write. Every one must spin. Let Tagore spin, like the others. Let him burn his foreign clothes; that is the duty to-day. God will take care of the morrow. As it says in the Gita, 'Do right'."

The August of 1921 saw the outbreak of the Moplah rebellion in Malabar which

lasted for several months. The Moplahs are uncultured Mohammadan fanatics, mostly agriculturists, who hate Hindu money-lenders and *zamindars* living upon the earnings of these poor people. Naturally the Hindus became the victims of their fury, although they had risen against the government that had violated its pledged word to the Muslim in the matter of the *khilafat* and the holy land of Arabia. The government tried to pin the responsibility on Gandhi. But when he decided to go to Malabar with Mohammad Ali to quiet the revolt, the government arrested the Ali brothers and other prominent leaders, including the foremost Hindu religious head, Shri Shankaracharya, for having voted for civil disobedience at the Khilafat Conference. At the Ali brothers' arrest, Gandhi announced that his cause was bound up with that of the Mohammadans, appealed to his countrymen to take up non-co-operation as a religious duty and expected every Indian not to serve, as a civil functionary or as a soldier, a government which had brought about the moral, political and economic degradation of the motherland.

India's reply to the Ali brothers' conviction was to push forward, with redoubled vigor, Gandhi's bloodless revolution. The All-India Congress Committee, meeting at Delhi on November 4, 1921, authorised Provincial Committees to proclaim, on the day the Prince of Wales landed at Bombay, civil disobedience in their provinces, if they considered the people prepared for it. The resisters were to take the vows of non-violence, *swadeshi* and hand-spinning. They and their families were to receive no pecuniary aid from the Committees.

The Prince set his foot on the shores of India on November the 17th, 1921. In Bombay there was a complete boycott of the royal visitor as well as a big bonfire of foreign cloth. Some rich persons, however, went to welcome the Prince, infuriating the populace; this led to a serious riot, costing many lives. This "defection" wounded Gandhi "like an arrow-shot in his heart." He rushed to the spot and chid the people for their unjustified violence. It was not an easy job to bring twenty thousand men back to reason; the riot quelled where Gandhi was, but broke out

at another place, still "the destruction was not half so great as that caused by the most insignificant revolutionary outbreak in Europe." To atone for the violence of his people, Gandhi inflicted upon himself a fast of twenty-four hours per week. Bombay alone exhibited violence; every where else in British India, the Prince passed through deserted streets, *hartals* being quiet, peaceful and orderly. The European community in India was alarmed, not so much by the Bombay riots, as by silent *hartals* throughout the country and spurred the government on to repression. The result was that old and rusty weapons were unearthed from the government's legislative armoury and a new edge put upon the ordinary criminal law; Congress and Khilafat Committees were banned and arrests were made by the thousand. But repression simply made India's determination grim and her sons and daughters flocked in thousands to keep the Congress lamp burning.

The Congress of 1921 met at Ahmedabad, reiterated its faith in non-co-operation, authorised the adoption of civil disobedience

as soon as the masses imbibed the spirit of non-violence. Anticipating the arrest of the leaders and the suppression of the Congress organisation, it elected Gandhi as the Dictator, with power to appoint a successor; he could not, however, change the Congress creed, or make peace with the government without the consent of the Congress Committee. The party of "violence—if necessary" brought forward a resolution approving of its policy, but under Gandhi's influence, the majority rejected it, for said Gandhi:

The British want us to put the struggle on the plane of machine-guns. They have these weapons and we have not. Our only assurance of beating them is to keep it on the plane where we have the weapons and they have not."

Within a few weeks, twenty-five thousand persons were lodged in jails and thousands of others stood ready to sacrifice themselves in the cause of India.

On February 9, 1922, Gandhi sent an open letter to the Viceroy, in which, courteously but clearly, he told Lord Reading that if within seven days the government did not announce a change of policy, mass civil

disobedience would be started "against a government which has brutally infringed upon freedom of the press, of association, and of speech." It was to begin at Bardoli, a district containing 140 villages with 87,000 inhabitants, where Gandhi's programme had always been understood and followed.

Scarcely had the letter reached Lord Reading's hands, when occurred the tragedy at Chauri Chaura, a rural market in U. P. After a Congress procession had peacefully passed on a market day, some stragglers were "interfered with and abused by the constables." The mob retaliated and the police opened fire; having exhausted their ammunition, the constables retired to their barracks which were besieged and set fire to by the infuriated mob. Gandhi could well have disclaimed all responsibility for the massacre, since non-co-operation volunteers were not a party to it, "but he had really become the conscience of India." Like the Man out of the East, who, about nineteen centuries before, had died on the Cross for the sins of humanity, Gandhi took upon himself all the sins of his people. Though

"Satan forbade it", Gandhi suspended civil disobedience he had just launched and imposed upon himself a fast of five days.

Two days later, the Working Committee of the Congress met at Bardoli, before which Gandhi put his doubts and troubles. His colleagues did not all agree with him, but "considerate and forgiving" as they were, they agreed, in sympathy with his scruples, to the suspension of civil disobedience, asking all organizations to strive to create an atmosphere of non-violence. Gandhi says:

"I know that the drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound. The country will have gained by my humiliation and confession of error. The only virtue I want to claim is truth and non-violence. I lay no claim to super-human powers.... I wear the same corruptible flesh that the weakest of my fellow-beings wear, and am, therefore, as liable to error as any....

...Confession of error is like a broom that sweeps away dirt and leaves the surface cleaner and brighter. I feel stronger for my confession. And the cause must prosper for the retracing. Never has a man reached his destination by persistence in deviation from the straight path.

Just as the addition of a grain of arsenic to a pot of milk renders it unfit as food, so will the civility of Bardoli prove unacceptable by the addition of the deadly poison from Chauri-Chaura. The latter represents India as much as Bardoli. Chauri-Chaura is, after all, an aggravated symptom. *In civil disobedience there should be no excitement. Civil disobedience is a preparation for mute suffering.* Its effect is marvellous, though unperceived and gentle. The tragedy of Chauri-Chaura is really the index finger. It shows the way India may easily go if drastic precautions not be taken. If we are not to evolve violence out of non-violence, it is quite clear that we must hastily retrace our steps and re-establish an atmosphere of peace, and not think of starting mass civil disobedience until we are sure of peace being retained in spite of mass civil disobedience being started and in spite of government provocation. Let the opponent glory in our humiliation and so-called defeat. It is better to be charged with cowardice than to be guilty of denial of our oath and sin against God....

"I must undergo personal cleansing. I must become a fitter instrument, able to register the slightest variation in the moral atmosphere about me. My prayers must have deeper truth and humility. For me there is nothing so cleansing as a fast. A fast undertaken for fuller self-expression, for attainment of the spirit's supremacy over the flesh, is a most powerful factor in one's evolution.

He advised the rioters to atone for their

sin by voluntary surrender to the law and a clean confession of their guilt. He himself made a public confession of his guilt in the *Young India* of February, 16:

"God has been abundantly kind to me. He has warned me for the third time that there is not as yet in India that truthful and non-violent atmosphere which, alone, can justify mass disobedience, which can be at all described as "civil," which means gentle, truthful, humble, knowing, wilful, yet loving, never criminal and hateful. He warned me in 1919 when the Rowlatt Act agitation was started....The next time it was through the events of Bombay that God gave me a terrific warning.

"But the bitterest humiliation was still to come. God spoke clearly through Chauri-Chaura. And when India claims to be non-violent and hopes to mount the throne of liberty through non-violent means, mob-violence even in answer to grave provocation is a bad augury. Non-violent attainment of self-government presupposes a non-violent control over the violent elements in the country. Non-violent non-co-operators can only succeed when they have succeeded in attaining control over the hooligan of India."

The opposition of the All-India Congress Committee at Delhi, on 24th February, 1922, to Gandhi's stifling the national ardour and to the Working Committee's ratification thereof, revealed to him that the majority was not

sincerely with him. Although the censure motion against the Working Committee and the annulment of its resolution were defeated, a division was created in the camp. In the *Young India* of March 2, Gandhi writes:

"There is so much under-current of violence, both conscious and unconscious, that I was actually and literally praying for a disastrous defeat. I have always been in a minority. In South Africa I started with practical unanimity, reached a minority of sixty-four and even sixteen, and went up again to a huge majority. The best and the most solid work was done in the wilderness of minority...I know that the only thing that the government dreads is this huge majority I seem to command. They little know that I dread it even more than they. I have become literally sick of the adoration of the unthinking multitude. I would feel certain of my ground if I was spat upon by them. A friend warned me against exploiting my "dictatorship," I have begun to wonder if I am not unconsciously allowing myself to be "exploited." My only safety lies in my shamelessness. I have warned my friends of the Committee that I am incorrigible. I shall continue to confess blunders each time the people commit them. The only tyrant I accept in this world is the "still small voice" within. And even though I have to face the prospect of a minority of one, I humbly believe I have the courage to be in such a hopeless minority. That to me is the only truthful position.

But I am a sadder and, I hope, a wiser man to-day. I see that our non-violence is skin-deep. We are burning with indignation. The government is feeding it by its insensate acts. It seems almost as if the government wants to see this land covered with murder, arson, and rapine in order to be able once more to claim exclusive ability to put them down."

The Bardoli decision adversely affected Gandhi's popularity in Congress circles. Another incident, the killing of a calf in agony, made the orthodox Hindus, who till then literally worshipped him, his bitter opponents. Gandhi himself is an orthodox Hindu; like his co-religionists, he venerates the cow, but with a new and deeper meaning. According to Gandhi

"the central fact of Hinduism is cow-protection; cow-protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in this gentle animal. Protection of the cow means the protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The appeal of the lower order

of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. Cow-protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live as long as there are Hindus to protect the cow."

In fact, he loves all live nature, even serpents. He says:

"Let us not forget that serpents have been created by the same God who created us and all other creatures. God's ways are inscrutable, but we may rest assured that he did not create animals like the lion and the tiger, the serpent and the scorpion, in order to bring about the destruction of the human race.

"In fact, I have implicit faith in the doctrine that so long as man is not inimical to the other creatures, they will not be inimical to him. Love is the greatest of the attributes of man. Without it the worship of God would be an empty nothing. It is, in short, the root of religion whatsoever."

Gandhi's non-violence could not bear to see a calf in excruciating pain, which was past all medical aid. He "felt that humanity demanded that the agony should be ended by ending life itself." His explanation is:

"Just as a surgeon does not commit violence, but practises the purest *Ahimsa*, when he wields his knife on the patient's body for the latter's benefit, similarly one may find it necessary, in certain imperative circumstances, to go a step further and sever life from

the body in the interest of the sufferer. It may be objected that, whereas the surgeon performs his operation to save the life of the patient, in the other case we do just the reverse. But on a deeper analysis it will be found that the ultimate object sought to be served in both cases is the same—namely, to relieve the suffering soul within from pain.”

This explanation did not, could not, satisfy the Hindus, for they believe that pain is the result of sins committed in previous lives; it has got to be borne, either in the present life or in the life to come; if the present life is ended in order to avoid pain, it interferes with the unfoldment of the spirit, which will have to take an extra birth in order to suffer the pain thus avoided. The result was strong denunciation of Gandhi from all sides.

CHAPTER IX

BEHIND IRON BARS (1922-1924).

Now was the opportunity for the bureaucracy. It had long been thinking of clapping Gandhi into jail in self-protection; there was strong agitation for his arrest in England and among the Anglo-Indians. Ever since 10 November, 1920, Gandhi had been expecting his arrest, and had, in his article, "If I am arrested" given instructions to his followers how to carry on the movement.

Reverting to this subject he wrote on the 9th March, 1922:

'Rivers of bloodshed by the Government cannot frighten me. I desire that the people should maintain perfect self-control and consider the day of my arrest a day of rejoicing. The Government believes that I am the soul of all agitation and that if I am removed it will be left in peace. The only thing that remains is for it to measure the strength of the people. Let the people preserve perfect peace and calmness. It is a matter of

no pride or pleasure to me, but of humiliation, that the Government refrain from arresting me for fear of an outbreak of universal violence.

He forbade *hartal* and demonstrations on his arrest, and appealed to the people to carry out the whole constructive programme and stiffen non-co-operation with the "satanic" government.

On the following day Gandhi returned from Ajmere and foretold his arrest that very night. Correspondence and merry conversation with the Ashram people about his imminent arrest kept him busy the whole day. At 10 o'clock in the night, after prayer, he asked his people to retire. Shanker Lal Banker and Ansuiya Bai, who now left the Ashram on a car, had not gone far, when the Police Superintendent arrested Banker, and brought him back to the Ashram. The Superintendent himself did not enter the Ashram, but sent word through Ansuiya Bai that he had come to arrest Gandhi but he could take as much time as he wanted. Gandhi was ready; the Ashram people assembled round him, and sang a beautiful song of Narsi Mehta. In a few minutes Gandhi

and Shanker Lal Banker were off to Sabar-mati jail, Mrs. Gandhi accompanying them upto the jail gate.

On Saturday, the 11th March, 1922, the distinguished accused were taken by special train to Shahibagh, some three miles away from the city, and produced at noon before Mr. Brown, Personal Assistant to the District Magistrate, in an improvised court in the Commissioner's office. The prosecution evidence over, Gandhi stated, "When the proper time comes, I shall plead guilty so far as disaffection towards the government is concerned." He admitted the authorship of the articles complained of and the editorship of the *Young India*, the whole policy of which he directed and controlled. Banker's statement was similar. They were committed to Sessions. The news of Gandhi's arrest and commitment to Sessions was received by the people with unusual courage and quiet which earned them police praise.

On the following Saturday, Gandhi and Banker were tried by Mr. Broomfield, Sessions Judge, in the Circuit House at Shahibagh. There was no crowd, except that of the

policemen and the military, on the road or in the court compound. There was no excitement in the city. The illustrious accused arrived with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and were received by other distinguished leaders present in the court. Though in the eyes of the law Gandhi was a criminal, the entire court rose as an act of spontaneous homage when he entered, and remained standing till he was shown a seat to the judge's left. On the judge reading and explaining the charges of exciting or attempting to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in British India, the accused pleaded guilty. Even then the Advocate-General pressed for a trial, but the judge did not agree. The Advocate-General prayed for a severe sentence on Gandhi. Asked if he would say anything on the question of sentence Gandhi stated that the Advocate-General

“was entirely fair to me in all the statements that he has made, because it is very true, and I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this court the fact that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me.”

Endorsing all the blame the Advocate-General had thrown on his shoulders for Bombay, Madras and Chauri-Chaura occurrences, Gandhi proceeded:

"He is quite right when he says that as a man of responsibility, a man having received a fair share of education and having had a fair share of experience of this world I should know the consequences of every one of my acts. I knew them. I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk and if I was set free I would still do the same. I wanted to avoid violence. I want to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is the last article of my faith. But I had to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which, I considered, has done an irreparable harm to my country or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips. I know that my people have sometimes gone mad. I am deeply sorry for it. I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act. I am here, therefore, to invite and submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what, in law, is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen."

In a written statement which Gandhi read, he said:

"I owe it, perhaps, to the Indian public and the public in England, to placate which this prosecution is

mainly taken up, that I should explain why from a staunch loyalist and co-operator I have become an uncompromising disaffectionist and non-co-operator."

After giving a brief account of his public life and the numerous acts of loyalty he had done for the Empire, for which the government had conferred various distinctions on him, he explained how the Rowlatt Act, "a law designed to rob the people of all real freedom," the Punjab horrors, and the breach of faith with the Muslims shattered all hopes and he:

"saw too that not only did the Reforms not mark a change of heart, but they were only a method of further draining India of her wealth and of prolonging her servitude. I came reluctantly to the conclusion that the British connection had made India more helpless than she ever was before politically and economically.

Before the British advent, India spun and wove in her millions of cottages, just the supplement she needed for adding to her meagre agricultural resources. This cottage industry, so vital for India's existence, has been ruined by incredibly heartless and inhuman processes, as described by English witnesses. Little do the town dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get, for the work they do for the foreign exploiter,

that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realise that the government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity, which is perhaps unequalled in history. The law itself in this country has been used to serve the foreign exploiter. My unbiassed examination of the Punjab martial law cases has led me to believe that at least ninety-five per cent of convictions were wholly bad. My experience of political cases in India leads me to the conclusion that in nine out of every ten the condemned men were totally innocent. Their crime consisted in love of their country. In ninety-nine cases out of hundred justice has been denied to Indians as against Europeans in the courts of India. This is not an exaggerated picture. It is the experience of almost every Indian who has had anything to do with such cases. In my opinion, the administration of the law is thus prostituted, consciously or unconsciously, for the benefit of the exploiter."

Gandhi deplored the ignorance on the part of the English administrators and their Indian associates of the fact "that they are engaged in the crime I have attempted to describe," and their honest, but mistaken, belief that

“they are administering one of the best systems devised in the world” and that India is making steady though slow progress. With regard to the charge, he said:

“Section 124 A under which I am happily charged is perhaps the prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen. Affection cannot be manufactured or regulated by law. If one has no affection for a person or thing one should be free to give the fullest expression to his disaffection so long as he does not contemplate to promote or incite to violence. But the section under which Mr. Banker and I are charged is one under which mere promotion of disaffection is a crime. I have studied some of the cases tried under it and I know that some of the most loved of India’s patriots have been convicted under it. I consider it a privilege, therefore, to be charged under it. I have endeavoured to give in their briefest outline the reasons for my disaffection. I have no personal ill-will against any single administrator, much less can I have any disaffection towards the King’s person. But I hold it to be a virtue to be disaffected towards a government which in its totality has done more harm to India than any previous system. India is less manly under the British rule than she ever was before. Holding such a belief, I consider it to be a sin to have affection for the system and it has been a precious privilege for me to be able to write what I have in the various articles tendered in evidence against me. In fact I

believe that I have rendered a service to India and England by showing in non-co-operation the way out of the unnatural state in which both are living. In my humble opinion non-co-operation with evil is as much a duty as is co-operation with good.

The only course open to you, the judge and the assessors, is either to resign your posts and thus dissociate yourselves from evil if you feel that the law you are called upon to administer is an evil and that in reality I am innocent, or to inflict on me the severest penalty if you believe that the system and law you are assisting to administer are good for the people of this country and that my activity is, therefore, injurious to the public weal.

After the trial was over, the Judges entenced Gandhi to six years' simple imprisonment and Banker to one year's simple imprisonment and a fine of a thousand rupees. Addressing Gandhi, the Judge said:

"You are in a different category from any person I have ever tried or am likely to have to try. It would be impossible to ignore the fact that, in the eyes of millions of your countrymen, you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and of even saintly life."

As the Judge left the Court, Gandhi's friends crowded round him and fell at his

feet. After they had taken leave, Gandhi was sent to jail.

About fourteen days after his conviction, his youngest son and Mr. C. Rajgopalachariar visited him in the Yaravda jail and found that Gandhi's "simple imprisonment is, indeed, worse than hard labour"; * he was locked up at night in a small cell meant for solitary confinement and was not allowed to see other prisoners; his food was insufficient; he was not permitted to have even religious books, but Gandhi was happy and "did not want any complaints to be made about his life in jail."

By his imprisonment, Gandhi's voice was silenced, his body was walled in, as if in a tomb, but the stone walls and iron bars of Yaravda jail could not confine Gandhi's spirit. From inside the jail, came the message of peace, non-violence and suffering and India readily responded. Her sons and daughters, in their thousands, joyfully handed themselves over to prison guards without shedding a drop of blood. Even the war-like Sikhs, whose prowess is writ large on the

*Historical Trial of Mahatma Gandhi p. 213.

battle-fields of Western Europe, sheathed their swords and fought, with absolute non-violence, the undesirable custodians of their sanctuaries backed by the might of the British Empire. In August, 1922, began, what Rolland calls "the daily martyrdom of Guru ka Bagh." Every day one hundred and twenty-five Sikhs would march fearlessly to reach Guru ka Bagh, or be brought back unconscious, daily police constables would prod them

"with the iron-tipped rods, jabbing harder and harder till blood began to flow and the Sikhs fell unconscious. Those that could get to their feet would begin to pray again, until they were beaten into unconsciousness like the others."*

The Lucknow meeting of the Congress Committee, on June 7, 1922, was the battleground between the adherents of non-violence on the one hand and the believers in violence and those who stood for prudence, on the other. After heated discussions, in which Gandhi's scheme of patient waiting and silent reconstruction was bitterly criticised, Civil Disobedience was proclaimed. At the same time, a commission was appointed to report if the country was ripe for it. Its report was

* Rolland p. 146-7.

discouraging. The forces of conservatism gathered strength and a party was proposed to be formed to fight within the Councils for *swaraj*. But the Congress at Gaya unanimously swore allegiance to Gandhi and his methods, and the country stood behind the Congress. The result was, as Balnche Watson wrote in the *Unity* of 16. November, 1922, that England lost about 70 million dollors in Indian revenues and some twenty million dollors in her trade with India in the course of a single year, thirty thousand Indians were in jail and the government machinery was entirely upset. The *Manchester Guardian* of February 16, 1923 pointed out that the movement was growing and would take ten years to bring about effective Civil Disobedience and that imprisonment had lost its sting and suggested the only peaceful solution possible, that is, to hold immediately a Round Table Conference to draft a constitution for an autonomous India within the Empire. India's right to Home Rule was now unquestionably admitted on all hands and though actual success was still in the womb of the future, India was already

victorious from a spiritual and mental point of view.

A peep into Gandhi's jail life shows that even there he fought inequality by personal suffering. On 1st May, 1923, he wrote to the Jail Superintendent declining to avail himself of special concessions so long as such prisoners, as were "not worse criminals than I, had probably a much higher position than I, and, in any case, they were accustomed to a more comfortable life than I have led for years," were not allowed similar concessions. Again in November, 1923, he asked the prison authorities to restrict his diet, as his comrade, Abdul Ghani, was not allowed the same latitude in diet as he.

From the solitary retreat behind iron bars provided by the British government, Gandhi was, early in 1924, suddenly removed to the Sassoon Hospital, Poona, suffering from an illness to the death, which was diagnosed as appendicitis. While Gandhi lay ill in the hospital, C. F. Andrews wrote:

"Here lies the ruler of India, whose influence far surpasses that of the Imperial power. Long after the names of the Governors who now reside in the palaces

at Delhi are forgotten, his name will still be honoured and exalted among the people, the memory of Mahatma Gandhi will be handed down for ever to their children by all the mothers of India, as the memory of one of the greatest, a saint and a redeemer.”*

Although Gandhi, like Tolstoi, regarded the medical science as the concentrated effort of black magic to which quackery was infinitely preferable and hospitals as institutions for the propagation of vice, he submitted to an operation by Colonel Maddock, saying, “In prison I must accept the prison regime. It involves medical supervision which now prescribed surgery; I submit.” While still a convalescent, he was released on February 5, 1924 and went to Juhu to recoup his health, announcing that he would remain in retirement. There was universal rejoicing in the country on the recovery and release of the “mahatma” whom, believed the people, God had sent back to destroy evil.

While Gandhi was spending his solitary confinement, watched by a warder convicted of murder, in spinning, praying and studying Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and, in spite of petty persecution, “feeling as happy

*Gandhi the Holy man pp. 12.

as a bird," his trusted lieutenants, Das and Nehru, were giving a new orientation to the policy of non-co-operation. Instead of boycotting the legislatures, as Congress men had hitherto done, the two leaders formed the Swaraj Party, to seek elections to the councils with a view to wreck them from within. In the general elections of 1923, the *Swarajists*, specially in Northern India, routed the Liberals and the other parties pledged to co-operation; and demonstrated, in the legislatures, the entire futility of the Reforms, and the helplessness of the Ministers to initiate measures for spreading education, improving public health and removing unemployment. The Ministers, in fact, were tied to the chariot-wheel of the Civil Service which retained the monopoly of real power and controlled the whole show of the Reformed government.

"The trouble about the Civil Service as a whole is that, though government at home may propose, the Civil Service disposes. The most liberal reform in the world can be wrecked if they refuse to work them. They don't really believe in constitutional progress, and even the best of them are perpetually fighting a rear-guard action against it. What is more, when they reach the heights of Executive Councillorship they are tired men. They

have probably done at least twenty-five years' service, which probably includes at least fifteen hot weathers in the scorching plains. There is nothing like a blistering sun for drying up energy and idealism,"*

In Bengal and the Central Provinces legislatures, the *Swrajists* formed the majority party and by their refusal to accept ministerial portfolios, by wrecking the ministries formed by the government from other groups, and by voting down budgets, they pricked the bubble of dyarchy which had to be suspended. In the central Legislative Assembly their monotonous demand, by stormy parliamentary tactics, of full responsible government, brought Home Rule within the realm of practical politics.

* Naked Fakir pp. 54-55.

CHAPTER X

CALM BEFORE STORM (1924-1928.)

Pandit Motilal Nehru and Chitranjan Das proceeded to Juhu in order to apprise Gandhi of the state of affairs in the country and to get his benediction for their carrying non-co-operation within the government on their own lines. But as Council entry "substituted active obstructionism for dignified aloofness and involved abandonment of the religious principle that the whole government, including its new representative machinery, was unholy,"* Gandhi declined to fall in with them; in fact he advised them to separate themselves from the Congress.

In the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Ahmedabad in June, 1924, on discovering that the *Swarajists* had gone too far in their non-co-operative co-operation

*Eminent Asians, pp. 465-66.

with the government to come back to the original non-co-operation, Gandhi made the Congress programme pre-eminently socio-economic. The new qualification for membership, requiring each member to spin 2000 yards of yarn a month, was calculated to virtually bar active politicians of the *Swarajists* group from membership. But this was not to be.

Gandhi, however, practically retired from politics and devoted himself to Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability and development of home industries, symbolised by the spinning-wheel. In July, 1924, he made his first public appearance after release and founded the All-India Spinners' Association. In less than a year, this Association could

"Employ 750 educated young men in its organization and operate 166 production depots and 245 sales depots taking in a million and a quarter dollars a year without reckoning the dyeing, printing, and *charkha*-making industries, contributing to the income of eighty thousand homes."*

The suppression of the Caliphate by the Turks and the refusal by Mustafa Kemal

*Eminent Asians, p. 467-68.

Pasha to permit the Indian Khilafat Conference delegation to enter Turkey put the Indian Mohammadans out of face before the world and deprived them of the motive which had driven them into Gandhi's fold. Their leadership now slipped from the hands of the virile nationalist Mohammadans into those of the old government-patronised communalists. The excesses committed by the Moplahs, largely advertised by the free distribution of leaflets and pictures through Leagues of Peace and Order formed by the government, created a ferment among the Hindus. The Hindus' organisation for the reclamation of those who were forcibly made Mohammadans but were not converted at heart annoyed the Muslims. The political segregation of the Hindus and Mohammadans, effected by a short-sighted government, had already created tension between the two communities. In the heat of non-co-operation all differences had melted away, but now that council entry had made congressmen settle down into normal activity, the events described above sharpened the communal cleavage. "The *Swarajists*, including, indeed,

many Muslims, maintained that the British secretly encouraged dissension."* Even Ramsay Macdonald once wrote of

"the suspicion that sinister influences have been and are at work on the part of the government; that Mohammadan leaders have been and are inspired by certain British officials; and that these officers, of malice afore-thought, sow discord between the Muslim and the Hindu communities."

Lord Olivier, formerly Secretary of State for India said,

"no one with a close acquaintance with Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that, on the whole, there is a predominant bias in British officialdom in favour of the Muslim community, partly on the ground of closer sympathy, but more largely as a make-weight against Hindu nationalism."

Colour was also lent to this view by the presence of secret agents, inflaming communal passions, who always failed to catch the eye of the police, and the failure of certain officials to take adequate and effective steps for the prevention of threatened communal riots. Bloody clashes occurred in widely separated parts of the country over petty matters; yet the number of Hindus and Muslims killed

* Eminent Asians, 474.

was far less than that of the negroes killed in America in the year.

Gandhi could not bear to see Hindus and Mohammedans rushing like wild brutes at each other's throat. He was contemplating some preventive action when the Hindu population of Kohat had to evacuate the town for fear of Mohammadan aggression. Gandhi decided to fast for twenty-one days in order to atone for the sins of his countrymen. He said, "I blame no one, I blame myself alone. I have lost the power to make myself audible to the people; beaten and helpless I turn to God Who alone can hear me." On September 18, 1924, he began his grim fast at the house of his friend, Mohammad Ali. By the 26th September, the leaders of all the religious communities in India, profoundly moved by the fast, had rushed to Delhi, formed themselves into a Conference and issued a proclamation pledging

"themselves to do their utmost to ensure that his resolutions are carried out and that all violations are strictly condemned. We empower the President personally to communicate to Mahatma Gandhi the solemn resolution of all those taking part to preserve peace, and

to announce to him our unanimous desire that he should break his fast immediately so that he may be present at the meeting and favour it with his co-operation, his advice, and his leadership."

Soon after this, specific agreements were reached on all the matters which had led to communal clashes.

It was for the first time in the world's history that fasting was undertaken in order to evoke political decisions. To a mere politician, the attempt appeared to be verging on lunacy; even saints like Tagore implored Gandhi "not to risk such a precious treasure of power in the frail barque of politics, allowing it to sail across endless waves of angry warfare." Tilak had said that politics was no field for saints. But Gandhi vehemently protested against divorce between politics and religion. "I do not believe that religion has nothing to do with politics. Politics divorced from religion is like a corpse, only fit to be burned." According to him all the great founders of religion were also great statesmen. Says Gandhi:

"Jesus was, in my humble opinion, a prince among politicians. The politics of his time consisted in

securing the welfare of the people by teaching them not to be seduced by the trinkets of the priests and the Pharisees. The latter then controlled and moulded the life of the people. To-day, the system of Government is so devised as to affect every department of our life. It threatens our very existence. If, therefore, we want to conserve the welfare of the nation, we must religiously interest ourselves in the doings of the governors, and exert a moral influence on them by insisting on their obeying the laws of morality."

Gandhi presided over the Congress in December, 1924, at Belgaum, and delivered the briefest address on record. In view of the fact that "whilst individuals hold firmly to their belief in non-co-operation, the majority of those who are immediately concerned have practically least faith in it, with the exception of boycott of foreign cloth," and the necessity of bringing about unity among all political groups, Gandhi advised the suspension of non-co-operation. He insisted on the boycott of foreign cloth by substituting *khaddar* for it so as not only to exert pressure on Great Britain but also to save the poor peasant's money and add to his scanty income. Boycott is tariff imposed, not by law, but by the will of the people. Lancashire trade

in India "has ruined the Indian peasant* and imposed partial idleness upon him by depriving him of the one supplementary occupation he had." Boycott of foreign cloth

"removes the greatest immoral temptation from Britain's way. I call the Lancashire trade immoral, because it was raised and sustained on the ruin of millions of Indian peasants. And as one immorality leads to another, the many proved immoral acts of Britain are traceable to this one immoral traffic. If, therefore this one great temptation is removed from Britain's path by India's voluntary effort, it would be good for India, good for Britain and as Britain is to-day the predominant world power, good even for humanity."

* The music of figures is in tune with this note that Gandhi has struck, e. g., value of muslin exported from Dacca only to England alone in 1787 was £ 1½ million; in 1817 it was nil. On the other hand, raw cotton exported from India in 1813, was 9 lbs. in weight, in 1838, it was 48 million lbs.

At the time when English duty on Indian imports was 67 per cent. Indian duty imposed by the British government on English imports into India was 3 per cent. In fact, as Moreland says, "At the end of the 16th century India was exceedingly ready to sell her produce but would take very little except silver in exchange.

Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability, according to him, are essential for *Swaraj*. Under Gandhi's lead, the *Swarajist* programme of Council-entry was ratified by the Congress. The spinning franchise was modified so as to allow the right of membership to one who did not spin himself but purchased and supplied to the All-India Spinners' Association the prescribed quantity of yarn every month. Though the busiest man in India, perhaps in the world, Gandhi himself spins regularly. Asked if he always spun during interviews, he replied with a "bite", "Yes, thus I feel my time is not wasted regardless of to whom I must talk. Besides, with my hands engaged so actively, is there not less temptation to use them on some vexing question?"

The *Swarajist* revolt and Gandhi's surrender to it made his opponents, especially among the British, jubilant, for they felt that Gandhi was a dead dog politically. Little did these worldly-wise men realise the possibility of a resurrection. It is a fact that, during the next four years, Gandhi kept aloof from aggressive politics and confined himself to *khaddar*,

untouchability and prohibition, but these apparently socio-economic activities had, in Gandhi's hands, great political potentialities.

In South Africa, Hertzog's party was again trying to oust the Indian from the position he had attained under the Gandhi-Smuts pact, and had succeeded in getting the Lower House to pass a Colour Bar Bill which was denounced even by Smuts in words which might well have come from Gandhi. Smuts said, "The only guarantee for the security of white civilization in South Africa is honest justice between man and man."—words which hold true all the world over. The Bill was thrown out by the Senate. In December, 1925, there was a new agreement between the Indian and the South African governments providing that the Indians were to conform to the western standard of living or to leave for India at government expense. Gandhi regarded this as "an honourable compromise."

Soon after the Belgaum Congress, Gandhi made a tour of the whole country, visiting even villages, and popularised his constructive programme. He says :

"I travel because I fancy that the masses want to meet me. I certainly want to meet them. I deliver my simple message to them in a few words and they and I are satisfied. It penetrates the mass mind slowly but surely."

Some incidents and utterances during this tour throw a flood of light on Gandhi's life and thought.

Gandhi's tour was the triumphal march of the ruler who held undisputed sway over India's heart. People turned out in their thousands to welcome him. Meetings were organised to present addresses to him; even the untouchables were invited to these meetings; but, at places, they were segregated to a far corner. Gandhi always noticed it and had either the untouchables admitted freely among the audience or else himself walked over to their corner and spoke from there.

At one such meeting in Mangrol, the organisers thought that the welcome would be incomplete without a song by the untouchable girls from their distant corner. But Gandhi remonstrated, saying:

"And what is the meaning of your hurling verses from the *Gita* at me in your songs in praise of me when

you believe not a word of it? If all your praise is really meant I would ask you to permit me to invite the untouchables there to come and sit in your midst. If you think you cannot do so, and that all the welcome you have given me was all conventional and not real, you will bravely speak out and you don't want them. In that case I will be only too glad to go and sit in their midst and speak from there. That will be my proper place, and you should not for a moment think that you will hurt or insult me if you ask me to go and sit amongst the untouchables."

What followed illustrates Gandhi's persuasive, and not militant, method of social reform. On votes being taken, over a thousand voted for and about thirty against admitting the untouchables. Gandhi humbly requested the minority "to withdraw and sit somewhere else where they may be free from pollution," but if they felt offended at the suggestion, he would "stand by his original proposal to go and take his place among the untouchables." A Brahman got up and asked Gandhi to adopt the latter course. Gandhi replied:

"Right, I will. Now I must say a word to the friends who have voted for me. In a delicate matter like this we can afford to hurt no one, even though we may be within our rights to do as we are doing. I ask you,

therefore, not to insist on the right of majority and permit me to seek refuge with the untouchables."

As Gandhi proceeded towards the enclosure, another orthodox gentleman appealed to the Brahman to withdraw, adding that every one would go with Gandhi to the untouchables' enclosure. The Brahman withdrew with half a dozen friends, and the untouchable girls were brought in—"not triumphantly, for Gandhiji had tabooed all cheering." Gandhi has been calling himself

"an untouchable and a sweeper, not out of arrogance, or ignorance, or because I am westernised, but because I may serve them all the better on that account. The western influence had nothing to do with my views about untouchability. They are the deliberate convictions of a man born and bred up in a purely orthodox Hindu atmosphere and tradition, of a man who had practised Hindu religious teaching, by actually imitating his orthodox parents, of a man who had tried to study human body as much as the Dweller of that tabernacle, of a man who had given years of study to the *Shastras* in perfect faith and devotion, of a man who had wandered throughout the length and breadth of India, discussing the matter with Shastris and Pandits, and who was more confirmed in his views as a result."

He could no more bear to be present in a place where the untouchables

are slighted or insulted, than a devoted student of *Ramayana* can bear to stay in a place where the name of Rama is dragged in the mire.

In one of his talks with students at Comilla, Gandhi defined national education thus:

‘That education is national, which educates in you a sense of fellow-feeling for all your countrymen, which teaches you to melt at the woes of your countrymen wherever they may be. That education is national, which makes you think in the terms of the nation, which makes you calculate not how a particular thing will benefit you individually, but what it means for the nation as a whole.’

The visit to Shantiniketan was, as Gandhi said, “a pilgrimage to the paternal roof,” where at least he could “descend from my heights...and shed my Mahatmaship” The elder brother of the poet blessed every item of Gandhi’s programme and said:

“Faith that overcomes mountains is the first step to knowledge—so say the *Shastras*. You started with that faith and to-day you are never afraid as you are in possession of the Bliss and Brahman. I have faith in you. I have faith in God. My faith in you is only next to my faith in God. Before truth and *ahimsa* all *avidya* will disappear. What is *avidya* to-day but Imperialism and Bolshevism and all the other isms? They will all be shattered under the bombshell of Truth. We

cannot fight them with their weapons. You cannot beard the lion in his own den. But Mahatmaji, you forged your own weapons, *charkha* is your weapon, not theirs; *ahimsa* is your weapon and not theirs and, therefore, they will be conquered. Even if there is a discomfiture all around, and fire and sword dealing destruction everywhere, I am sure you will stand unscathed and uninjured like that fabled bird, Phœnix, rising ever again from its own ashes. And nothing that you do is lost. Work on in faith. All those that oppose you will disappear like the bubbles of time. Truth will conquer and I can see defeat written on their foreheads.”*

At Calcutta, the Rotary Club invited Gandhi to address them on the ‘Economic and Spiritual value of the *charkha*’. The meeting was held in the Grand Hotel and a strictly vegetarian luncheon was provided. About a hundred Britishers with a sprinkling of Indian guests were present. Gandhi appreciated particularly the delicate courtesy extended to him of making their luncheon “a Bengali widow’s luncheon, and the invitation to speak on a subject as uninteresting as the potato and cabbage menu spread before them.” The audience listened as seriously

* Gandhi in Indian villages. pp. 107-110.

to the claims of *takli* (whirligig) to be the competitor of spinning mills, as Gandhi advanced them.

"The mills cannot possibly reach even a fraction of the millions in the seven hundred thousand villages spread over the vast area of the country, most of them not even reached by the railway line. A tenth of the population lives on one meal a day consisting of dry bread and a pinch of dirty salt, and does not, even according to the liberal computation of Lord Curzon, get on an average more than Rs. 3 a month per head. Does not a sum of Rs. 5 or 6 per month added to this paltry income mean a fortune to them? Well, then, the spinning wheel means that to the millions. It is the only thing that can be made universal, only thing which does not require any special skill to learn and which is a marvel of cheapness. I, frankly, can not think of a device more eminently fitted to solve the problem of the economic distress, famine and flood in India.

And if the economic argument is unassailable, the spiritual which follows from it is equally so. If the mills make superfluous additions to the treasures of the already rich,* the spinning wheel is certainly spiritually superior to it in as much as it fills the pockets not of those who are already rich but those of the starving and the needy millions. I read with deep interest

* who, says Sir Thomas Roe, "are nothing but voluptuousness and wealth intermingled."

Drummonds book on the *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* long ago, and I am sure that if I had that writer's facile pen, I would demonstrate even better that there is a spiritual law in the natural world. I have read books by some men seriously advocating electrocution to end the race of the starving and the diseased and the infirm. It may be an eminently economical remedy, but it is not a human or a spiritual remedy. In the spinning-wheel I am offering to my countrymen a spiritual remedy, a remedy with which they have been familiar for ages, and a remedy which, if seriously tried, would save them from the hideous consequences that town and factory life involves.

And need I say anything as to the spiritual reaction, on the mind, of the simple instrument? Well, so many who have tried it bear witness to the fact that it brings peace to the distracted and troubled mind, and the genius of Goethe has woven that effect into song for ages, when he represents Margaret spinning away at the wheel and through its inspiration, spinning out of her lips a song as perfect as the yarn from the wheel. I am not an enemy of inventions but as matter misplaced is dirt, all inventions misplaced are abominations, to be shunned if they do not add to human dignity and peace."

In his discourse, Gandhi had scrupulously avoided the political aspect of the *charkha*, but a question by Dr. Sarbadhikari compelled him to speak on it:

"If he had the authority of Queen Elizabeth he would deal with the question just as she had done. She made it criminal for her people to use Holland lace,* and imported workmen from abroad to teach the people how to make lace, and interdicted the use of lace until then. He was not an out-and-out free-trader and he would, if he could, effectively stop all import of foreign cloth by heavy import duties. And you have asked,' said he warming up, 'how the industry had died. Well, it is a painful answer, but I must give it. *It was made to die*'. He could have narrated the whole bloodcurdling tale which tarnishes the record of the East India Company, but he refrained. 'It would make the blood of every honest man and woman boil to turn over the pages written not by Indians but by the servants of the Company. When I tell you that people had to cut off their thumbs in order to escape the terrorism set forth, you would understand the position.'†

In fact *charkha* to Gandhi is the harbinger of *swaraj*. At another meeting he said:

"Today you see only a thread coming out as I turn the wheel and draw the sliver. But it is my certain conviction that with every thread that I draw, I am spinning the destiny of India."

* Lecky gives an instance of a lady being fined Rs. 200 for putting on Indian Muslim, showing that not only Holland lady but also Indian Muslim was penalised.

† Gandhi in Indian Villages pp. 159 60.

Addressing a crowded meeting in Overtown Hall, Calcutta, on 'Nationalism and hatred of the foreign rulers', a subject with which the younger generation is faced today, especially in Bengal, Gandhi said, "Nationalism is perfectly consistent with the love of those whose rule we do not like." The recent wars and the administration of law in civilised societies were generally taken to prove that hatred seemed to be of the essence of nationalism; but

"so long as a large body of men and women retain that attitude, the progress of this country, the progress of the world is retarded. The world is weary of hate. We see that this song of hate has not benefitted humanity. Let it be the privilege of India to turn a new leaf and set a lesson to the world. Transfer your hatred from the evil-doer to the evil itself. I have not hesitated to call the system of government under which we are labouring "satanic," and I withdraw naught out of it. But I know that I shall not deal with it, if I begin to devise means of punishing the evil-doer. My business is to love them and by patient and gentle handling to convert them.

Non-co-operation is not a hymn of hate.* I know that many who call themselves *satyagrahis* or non co operators do not deserve to bear that name. They have done

* Like the following, by Mark Twain :

violence to their own creed. Real non-co-operation is non-co-operation with evil and not with the evil-doer. Suffering then is the secret. Hatred is not essential for nationalism. Race-hatred will kill the real national spirit. We want freedom for our country, but not at the expense or exploitation of others, not so as to degrade other countries. For my own part I do not want the freedom of India if it means the extinction of England or the disappearance of Englishmen. I want the freedom of my country so that other countries may learn something from my free country, so that the resources of my country might be utilised for the benefit of mankind. Just as the cult of patriotism teaches us today that the individual has to die for the family, the family has to die for the village, the village for the

“O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the cries of the wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless, with their little children to wander unbefriended through wastes of their desolated lands in rags and hunger and thirst, sport of the sun-flames in summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it—for our sakes, who adore Thee. Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their ways with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask of One Who is the Spirit of love and Who is the ever faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Grant our prayer. O Lord, and Thine shall be the praise and honor and glory now and ever. Amen.”

district, the district for the province, and the province for the country, even so a country has to be free in order that it may die, if necessary, for the benefit of the world."

That Gandhi's non-violence is not unmanliness, was forcefully brought out in his Bhagalpore speech on the Hindu-Muslim question. He told the audience,

"Since neither party was prepared to compromise and each was afraid of the other, the best way would be, without seeking the intervention of the government, to settle the matters in dispute by the method of the *lathi*. Retreat out of fear was cowardice and cowardice would not hasten a settlement or the advent of non-violence. Cowardice was a species of violence which it was the most difficult to overcome. One could hope to persuade a violently inclined person to shed his violence and take up the superior force of non-violence, but since cowardice was a negation of all force, it was impossible to teach a mouse non-violence in respect of the cat. He would simply not understand what non-violence could be, because he had not the capacity for violence against the cat. Would it not be a mockery to ask a blind man not to look at ugly things."*

Gandhi hung his head in shame when some people told him that in order to maintain non-violence they had run away when

*Gandhi in Indian villages pp. 163-64.

the police was looting their property and molesting their womenfolk, and said:

“It is manly enough to defend one’s property, honour or religion at the point of sword. It is manlier and nobler to defend them without seeking to injure the wrong-doer. But it is unmanly, unnatural and dishonourable to forsake the post of duty and in order to save one’s skin to leave property, honour or religion to the mercy of the wrong-doer.”

In November, 1925, Gandhi discovered some errors among the boys and girls of the Ashram, and in order to set them right, fasted for seven days. Strange as it may seem, the fast had a more salutary effect on the delinquents than any amount of punishment could ever have.

By the time of the general elections of 1926, there was a marked change in public opinion towards the programme of the *Swaraj* party. On the one hand, the failure of the *Swaraj* party in councils to bring India nearer *swaraj* or even to prevent government terrorism—due not to any fault of its own, but to the mockery of a constitution it had to work through—and the tour of Gandhi, had created a strong feeling for absolute non-co-operation. Hindu-Muslim clashes, on the other hand, had raised

into prominence, new communal "leaders" whose only qualification for leadership was their extreme hatred of the rival community. Gandhi could very well have organised non-co-operative nationalism to give a fight to the government and communalism but he chose to wait. In the general election the *Swarajists* lost heavily in some provinces, and in the central Assembly they captured only about one third seats. Gandhi said:

"This is my endorsement by my people. I will lead them forward now, if necessary, to the use of the ultimate weapon: Mass Civil Disobedience."

The Congress of 1926, for the first time, took cognizance of the other oppressed nations of the east. "The time has come," said Srinivasa Iyengar, "for us seriously to think of a federation of the Asiatic peoples for their common welfare." In the Delhi Assembly, he unsuccessfully interpellated the Government on the despatch of Indian troops to China. Gandhi also wrote:

"My mind goes to China. I wish I could help. Young China opposes any movement, action, or person interfering with Chinese self-expression. Chinese, even Christians, have begun to distrust the Christian endeavour that has come from the west into their midst."

Gandhi even thought of accepting the invitation of the Organisation of Chinese students to go to China and introduce his methods of fighting in that country. To fight the west with its own weapons involved a great risk, for

“In casting off western tyranny it is quite possible for such a nation to become enslaved to western thought and methods.—This second slavery is worse than the first.”

But the rising tide of non-co-operation prevented him from leaving India.

In November 1927, Gandhi spent three weeks in Ceylon, collecting money for *khadi*. Ceylon gave him a splendid welcome. The collections came up to over a lac of rupees; every one, rich or poor, Indian or Singhalese, white or brown, contributing his mite. One Mrs. De Silva, while making her contribution for *khadi*, pressed Gandhi to “step into her house one day.” Gandhi agreed on condition that she did some business with him, as he could go to her place only as a *khadi*-hawker. She agreed and, as an earnest of her promise, made an immediate purchase of over a hundred rupees. Gandhi went to her house with some *khadi* and expressed the hope that

she would take the whole lot. She not only took the whole lot but gave a blank cheque for all the *khadi* he had left at home, promising to popularise it in the various charitable institutions maintained by her husband and to send more orders in future.

The law students at Colombo asked Gandhi how to spiritualise the legal profession. He readily gave them the following advice:

“The first thing which you must always bear in mind, if you would spiritualise the practice of law, is not to make your profession subservient to the interests of your purse, as is unfortunately but too often the case at present, but to use your profession for the service of your country. There are instances of eminent lawyers in all countries who led a life of self-sacrifice, who devoted their brilliant legal talents entirely to the service of their country although it spelt almost pauperism for them. In India you have the instance of the late Mano Mohan Ghose. He took up the fight against the indigo planters and served his poor clients at the cost of his health, even at the risk of his life, without charging them a single pie for his labours. He was a most brilliant lawyer, yet he was a great philanthropist. That is an example that you should have before you. Or better still you can follow Ruskins’ precept given in his book *Unto This Last*. ‘Why should a lawyer charge fifteen pounds for his work’, he asks

‘whilst a carpenter, for instance, hardly gets as many shillings for his work?’ The fees charged by lawyers are unconscionable everywhere. I confess, I myself have charged what I would now call high fees. But even whilst I was engaged in my practice, let me tell you, I never let my profession stand in the way of my public service.

And there is another thing which I would like to warn you against. In England, in South Africa, almost every-where, I have found that in the practice of their profession lawyers are, consciously or unconsciously, led into untruth for the sake of their clients. An eminent English lawyer has gone so far as to say that it may even be the duty of a lawyer to defend a client whom he knows to be guilty. There I disagree. The duty of a lawyer is always to place before the judges, and to help them to arrive at the truth, never to prove the guilty as innocent. It is upto you to maintain the dignity of your profession. If you fail in your duty, what shall become of the other professions? You, young men, claiming as you have just done to be the fathers of tomorrow, should be the salt of the nation. If the salt loses its flavour wherewith shall it be salted.”

In reply to one of the numerous addresses presented to him in Ceylon, Gandhi delivered the threefold message of *khadi*. Its economic message to every starving man or woman is,

“Spin me and you will at least find a crust of bread for yourself.”

Its *cultural* message, "to all the people of the earth, no matter to what country, religion or race they belong," is

"Seeing that there are millions on the face of this earth who are compulsorily idle for want of work, and since I am the only instrument that can be placed in their hands without taking work away from a single mouth, will you not spin me for the sake of these millions and produce an atmosphere of honest industry, honest work and self-reliance and hope for all on God's earth?"

The spinning wheel has a *metaphorical* message too.

"It stands for simple life and high thinking. It is a standing protest against the modern mad rush for adding material comfort upon comfort and making life so complicated as to make one totally unfit for knowing one's self or one's God. It says appealingly every minute of our life to you and to me: 'Use me and you will find that if all of you unitedly make use of me, small and insignificant though I may appear, I shall be an irresistible force against the mad indiscriminate worship of the curse called machinery.' It is a standing rebuke to the men and women of Ceylon who go in for all kinds of fashions and styles and it tells them: 'Do not for the sake of your country ape the manners and customs of others which can only do harm to you and for heaven's sake do not wish to be what every one of the people of Ceylon cannot be.'"

In reply to the welcome given him by the President of the Ceylon National Congress, Gandhi explained self-government, in words, which hold good even in India:

“Self-expression and self-government are not things which may be either taken from us by anybody or which can be given us by anybody. It is quite true that if those who happen to hold our destinies, or seem to hold our destinies in their hands, are favourably disposed, are sympathetic, and understand our aspirations, no doubt it is then easier for us to expand. But after all self-government depends entirely upon our own internal strength, upon our ability to fight against the heaviest odds. Indeed, self-government which does not require that continuous striving to attain it and to sustain it is not worth the name. I have, therefore, endeavoured to show both in word and in deed, that political self-government, that is self-government for a large number of men and women, is no better than individual self-government, and therefore it is to be attained by precisely the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule, and so as you know also, I have striven in India to place this ideal before the people in season and out of season, very often much to the disgust of those who are politically minded merely.”

Gandhi's influence was now penetrating even into Indian forests and African wilds. In the Congress of the Oppressed Colonial

Nations, at Brussels, Gumedi, the South African Zulu, representing the Negroes, having described the persecution of his people by the "civilized" white, declared that they also wished to follow India and fight their oppressors with non-violence. The Bhils of the Indian forest told a well-known Bengali that although they had not seen Gandhi, they had given up hunting and were trying to live by agriculture, as the *Mahatma* had said, "Leave the forests in peace." They also resolved to abstain from killing domestic animals, and when they could not find purchasers for the stocks of cattle they held, they sacrificed their entire wealth at Gandhi's altar by letting the animals go free. Gandhi, as it were, thus, partook of the nature of the Illimitable and Eternal, from which he has sprung and to which he is bound.

The Madras Congress of 1927, declared that "the goal of the Indian people is complete independence." This declaration did not find support from Gandhi, but even he, with his influence and power of persuasion, was unable to curb the spirit of separatism. Subsequent Congresses reiterated this goal.

"Belated and opposed to popular sentiments" is the legend on the Indian seal of the British government. For about eight years the British government ignored India's clamour for political advance—no, not quite ignored it, but met it with ruthless repression. Now it was moved to action—an action which raised bitter and united opposition in India. It appointed an All-White Commission of six political nonentities with Sir John Simon as its Chairman to enquire into the working of dyarchy and to draft a plan to succeed it. All the divergent political parties in India united in boycotting the Simon seven. February 3, 1928, the day on which the Commission landed, was observed as a day of mourning all over India; all business was suspended and black flag processions paraded the streets. Wherever the ill-fated Commission proceeded, it was met with *hartals*, black flags and shouts of "Go back Simon." The government resented these peaceful demonstrations and freely used *lathis* against them, as if the contagion of law-breaking had affected the government also. But law-breaking by the government, far from being

non-violent, resulted in, was perhaps aimed at, breaking of innocent heads. Lala Lajpat Rai, the Lion of the Punjab, an old man of sixty-four, P. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the Idol of Young India, were among those who got *lathi* blows, the former expiring within a few days of the beating. Incidents like these accentuated bitterness in India.

While the officials stage-managed, for the Commission, receptions and garden parties under heavy police guard, the people invented ingeneous devices to bring home to them their keen resentment. For instance, at Lucknow, a large group of rustics was entertained the whole night and taught to shout "Welcome Simon;" when in the morning, the Commission arrived, these rustics shouted "Go back Simon" and waved black flags, they had kept concealed all the time. A garden party was arranged within a walled enclosure, all access to which was barred by the police, a group of young men shouted "Go back Simon" from the top of a private house in a corner of the enclosure; while Sir John and his colleagues, surrounded by local officials, stipendiary and honorary, were having tea on

the beautiful lawn, there were hovering over their heads black kites and balloons with "Go back Simon" in prominent white letters on them; some of them were even dropped on the lawn.

After two visits to India, the Simon Commission produced, in June 1930, a report, which was universally condemned. But before its publication, India had given England definite notice of her demand. Under the leadership of P. Moti Lal Nehru, all parties, sects and communities met at Lucknow and Calcutta and produced the historic document, known as the Nehru Report, containing the nation's minimum demand representing the greatest common measure of agreement amongst all parties. "At the Calcutta Congress of 1928, the younger and progressive sections led by P. Jawahar Lal Nehru, Subas Bose and Srinivasa Iyengar, put forth a powerful and determined opposition to the acceptance of the Nehru report, based as it was on Dominion Status, and supported complete Independence. Gandhi brought about a compromise and the Congress declared its acceptance of Dominion Status, if granted

by the end of 1929, and left the supporters of Independence free to work for it.

Soon after the Congress, Lord Irwin went to England to have personal consultation with the new (Labour) Cabinet and his own (Conservative) party on Indian affairs. After his return, Lord Irwin made a declaration on 31st October 1929, reiterating that the goal of British policy in India was

“the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.”

and adding that

“in view of the doubts which have been expressed both in Great Britain and India regarding the interpretation to be placed on the intentions of the British Government in enacting the statute of 1919, I am authorised, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, to state clearly that in their judgment, it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as therein contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status.”

The intention of the government to hold a Round Table Conference in London was also announced. Though British promises were now at a heavy discount in India, this

declaration, coming as it did from a true Christian like Irwin, raised great hopes. The leaders of all parties, including Gandhi, met at Delhi, and adopted a resolution appreciating the sincerity of the Viceroy's declaration and the British government's desire to placate Indian opinion, and hoping "to be able to tender our co-operation to His Majesty's Government in their efforts to evolve a scheme of Dominion Constitution suitable for India's needs." The leaders considered

"it vital for the success of the proposed conference that

- (a) a policy of general conciliation should be definitely adopted to induce a calmer atmosphere;
- (b) political prisoners should be granted a general amnesty;
- (c) representation of progressive political organisations should be effectively secured; and
- (d) the Indian National Congress, as the largest among them, should have predominant representation".

The resolution continued

"We understand, however, that the Conference is to meet not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established but to frame a scheme of Dominion Constitution for India".

In order to pave the way for the success of the proposed Conference, a heart-to heart talk between the Viceroy and some of the Indian leaders, including Gandhi, was arranged, on 23rd December, 1929, but contrary to all expectations, after three hours attempt, it proved abortive.

CHAPTER XI

THE STORM BURSTS (1929-1931)

The 1929 Congress met at Lahore with P. Jawahar Lal Nehru, as President, in an atmosphere surcharged with excitement. At Gandhi's instance, the Congress adopted the momentous resolution which the British government treated as a declaration of war. By this resolution, the Congress appreciated the efforts of H. E. the Viceroy towards a peaceful settlement of the national demand for *swaraj* but, in view of the failure of the conference between the Viceroy and the Indian leaders, was "of opinion that nothing is to be gained in the existing circumstances by the Congress being represented at the proposed Round Table Conference." Dominion status not having been granted by the end of 1929, in accordance with its resolution of the last year, the Congress now

declared the Nehru scheme of Dominion Status to have lapsed and "that *Swaraj* in the Congress creed shall mean Complete Independence".

"And, as a preliminary step towards organising a campaign for Independence and in order to make the Congress policy consistent with the change of creed, this Congress declares a boycott of the Central and Provincial Legislatures and calls upon Congressmen to abstain from participating, directly or indirectly, in the Legislatures in future, and the present members of the Legislatures to tender their resignation;

And the Congress calls upon the nation to concentrate its attention upon the constructive programme of the Congress and authorises the All-India Congress Committee, whenever it deems fit, to launch a programme of Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise, and under such safeguards as it may consider necessary".

As a reply to this resolution, the Viceroy delivered a provocative speech in the Assembly, widening the gulf between the people and the government. Gandhi welcomed the speech and declared that "His Excellency the Viceroy deserves the thanks of every Congressman for having cleared the atmosphere and letting us know exactly where we stand". Further,

Gandhi placed before Irwin and Macdonald 'eleven crying needs' of India with the offer,

"Let the Viceroy satisfy us with regard to these very simple but vital needs of India. He will then hear no talk of Civil Disobedience; and the Congress will heartily participate in any conference where there is a perfect freedom of expression and demand".

The eleven needs were, India running dry, restoration of 16d ratio, fifty per cent. reduction in land revenue and imposition of legislative control on it, abolition of salt tax, at least fifty per cent. reduction in military expenditure, fifty per cent. or less reduction in the salaries of the highest grade services, protective tariff on foreign cloth, enactment of the Coastal Reservation Bill, discharge of all political prisoners not convicted of murder or attempt to murder, together with the withdrawal of pending cases, repeal of section 124-A and Regulation III of 1818 and permission to all Indian exiles to return, abolition or placing under popular control of the C.I.D. and lastly, issue of licenses for fire-arms for self-defence, subject to popular control.

January 26, 1930, was declared the Independence Day. On that day, national

flags were hoisted all over the country and hundreds of thousands of persons signed the pledge of Independence, solemnly resolving "to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing *purna swaraj*" (Complete Independence) by non-violent means, including the non-payment of taxes.

The Working Committee, at its Ahmedabad sitting, on 15th February, 1930, decided to launch civil disobedience to attain Independence and authorised Gandhi and others to start it as and when they decided. Writing about this resolution, Gandhi says:

"For me the resolution is not so much political as a religious effort. The responsibility devolving on me is the greatest I have ever undertaken. It was irresistible but all will be well if it is *ahimsa* that is guiding me. My Civil Disobedience is, sometimes, the peremptory demand of love. Dangerous it undoubtedly is but no more than the encircling violence. The danger lies in one direction—in the out-break of violence side by side with Civil Disobedience. If it does, I know no way. No retracing, as at the time of Bardoli; the struggle in freedom's battle of non-violence against violence, no matter from what quarter the latter comes, must continue till a single representative is left alive.

More, no man can do. To do less would be tantamount to want of faith."

In accordance with his usual practice to give timely notice of his intentions to his adversary, Gandhi sent to the Viceroy, through Reginald Reynolds, on 2nd March, 1930, a letter saying:

"Before embarking on Civil Disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years I would fain approach you and find a way out. My personal faith is absolutely clear. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine."

Explaining why Gandhi regarded British rule as a curse, he wrote:

"It has impoverished the dumb millions by the system of progressive exploitation and by the ruinous expense of the military and civil administration which the country can never afford. It has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture and by the policy of disarmament it has degraded us spiritually. Lacking in inward strength we have been reduced by all but universal disarmament to a state bordering on cowardly helplessness."

The letter proceeded:

"In common with many of my countrymen I had hugged a fond hope that the proposed Round Table

Conference might furnish a solution. But when you said plainly that you could not give any assurance that you or the British Cabinet would pledge yourselves to support the scheme of full Dominion Status, the Round Table Conference could not possibly furnish the solution for which vocal India is consciously and the dumb millions are unconsciously thirsting. Needless to say that there never was any question of Parliament's verdict being anticipated. Instances are not wanting of the British Cabinet in anticipation of the Parliamentary verdicts having pledged itself to a particular policy...The resolution of Independence could cause no alarm...For has it not been admitted by responsible British statesmen that Dominion Status is virtual Independence? What, however, I fear is that there never has been any intention of granting such Dominion Status to India in the immediate future...It seems as clear as day-light that responsible British statesmen do not contemplate any alteration in British policy that might adversely affect Britain's commerce with India or require an impartial and close scrutiny of Britain's transaction with India. If nothing is done to end the process of exploitation India must be bled with an ever increasing speed."

After putting before the Viceroy "some of the salient points" in British exploitation of India, included in Gandhi's eleven points, Gandhi went on:

"Having unquestioning and immovable faith in the efficacy of non-violence, as I know it, it would be sinful on my part to wait any longer. This non-violence will be expressed through Civil Disobedience, for the moment confined to the inmates of *Satyagraha Ashram*, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement with its obvious limitations. I know that, in embarking upon non-violence, I shall be running what might fairly be termed a mad risk but the victories of truth have never been won without risks, often of the gravest character. The conversion of a nation that has consciously or unconsciously preyed upon another, far more numerous, far more ancient and no less cultured than itself, is worth any amount of risk. I have deliberately used the word conversion, for my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India. I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them even as I want to serve my own. If the people join me, as I expect they will, the suffering that they will undergo, unless the British nation sooner retraces its steps, will be enough to melt the stoniest hearts. The plan through Civil Disobedience will be to combat such evils as I have sampled out. If we want to sever British connection, it is because of such evils. When they are removed, the path becomes easy. Then the way to a friendly negotiation will be open. If British commerce with India is purified of greed you will have no difficulty in recognising our Independence."

Lastly, he respectfully invited the Viceroy
 "to pave the way for the immediate removal of those evils and thus open the way for a real Conference between equals interested only in promoting the common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship and in arranging the terms of mutual help, and commerce equally suited to both,"

adding

"but if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils, and my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the eleventh day of this month, I shall proceed with such co-workers of the *Ashram* as I can take to disregard the provision of the Salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the Independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land the beginning will be made with this evil."

Unfortunately, the Viceroy's reply

"was curt and formal. His Excellency regretted that Mr. Gandhi had decided upon a course of action that would lead to the violation of the law and involve danger to the public peace."*

Gandhi's rejoinder in the *Young India* said, "On bended knees I asked for bread and I received stone instead."

With regard to "violation of law and danger to public peace" Gandhi wrote:

* India's Struggle for Swaraj p 278.

"In spite of the books containing rules and regulations, the only law that the nation knows is the will of the British administrators. The only public peace the nation knows is the peace of the public prison. India is one vast prison-house. I repudiate this law and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the nation for want of free vent."

The Viceroy's reply left to the Congress no alternative but to start Civil Disobedience. Gandhi, who was appointed the Dictator, ordered an attack on the salt laws, by manufacture of salt, its removal without payment of duty and its distribution. Gandhi decided to open himself, with the inmates of the *Ashram* and the members of the *Vidyapith*, the campaign at Dandi, a village on the sea-coast, about a hundred miles from the *Ashram*. This distance was to be done on foot.

The day preceding the historic march was devoted to fasting and prayer. In the evening, Gandhi delivered a message to the people on the banks of the Sabarmati, concluding it with the words,

"Our case is strong, our means purest, and God is with us. There is no defeat for the *satyagrahis* till they

give up the truth. I pray for the success of the battle which begins tomorrow."

At 6-30 in the morning of 12th March, 1930, Gandhi, with a band of 79 devoted *satyagrahis*, set forth from the *Ashram* with the grim determination not to return to the *Ashram* "until I succeed in getting the Salt Act repealed." He declared, "Either I shall return with what I want, or else my dead body will float on the ocean." Gandhi, with a gentle smile playing on his face, indicating his undying faith in the justice of India's cause and its ultimate success, was at the head of these Pilgrim Fathers, who marched in rows of three each, with staves in their hands and bags of scanty belongings hanging by their sides. On the route flowers and cocoanuts were offered them, streets were watered and bedecked with flags and flowers for them to pass through and vast crowds from far and near turned out to have Gandhi's *darshan* and hear his gospel of non-violence and truth.

After twenty-four days' march, the party reached Dandi on the 5 April and spent the night in fasting and prayer. Next morning,

at 6, after prayers, Gandhi, with eighty-four volunteers, followed by a large crowd, proceeded at a slow pace and entered the sea for a bath amidst cries of "*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*" rending the skies. Exactly at 8.30 a. m. he picked up a lump of natural salt from a pit, technically breaking the Salt Act. This was a signal to the whole country, where young and old, villagers and city people, in large numbers took to the manufacture and sale of contraband salt. Large numbers of Congressmen and others were arrested, convicted and imprisoned and larger numbers marched out to take their place. About this time, V. J. Patel's resignation from the Presidency of the Assembly, stating how the government had made it difficult, almost impossible, for him to carry on his duties and declaring that the country could better be served by his joining the movement, sent a wave of enthusiasm through the country.

On May 4, the government arrested Gandhi after midnight, in his camp at Karadi under an archaic law (Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827) which was meant to deal with the enemies of the British, when they were at

war with the Indian people, when the East India Company had gradually changed its organisation from trading voyages to factory and from factory to fort and was then changing it from fort to territorial sovereignty. Gandhi was marched off to Yaravda jail. But his arrest and detention gave fresh vigour to the movement and evoked protests from all parts of the world. One hundred and two American clergymen, headed by Dr. Holmes, could not bear to see history repeating itself, the Herod of the West crucifying the Christ of the East; they cabled to the British Premier, the author of *Awakening of India*, a book once proscribed by the Indian government, to come to terms with Gandhi and the Indian people and save, what would otherwise be a catastrophe to all mankind. But power and wealth are deaf to the voice of Christ and his Ministers.

In India, Gandhi's arrest led to processions, *hartals*, and mammoth meetings. On the whole the demonstrations were peaceful, though at places, the demonstrators were provoked and became violent, *e. g.* at Sholapur, where six police outposts were burnt, or

Howrah, where an attempt was made to hold up a train. *Lathi* charges and firing were resorted to indiscriminately, free use—or misuse—was made of section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, and martial law was also pressed into service.

Salt *satyagraha*, however, continued. Mr. Abbas Tyabji, ex-Chief Justice of Baroda, took Gandhi's place; and on his arrest, Mrs. Naidu took up the leadership. She and her volunteers were arrested but subsequently released. Under the lead of the venerable Imam Saheb, aged 62 and Gandhi's colleague in South Africa, two thousand and five hundred volunteers raided Dharsana Salt Depot. Police made *lathi* charges; several times were the volunteers driven back, and several times they renewed the attack in the face of relentless *lathi* blows, resulting in one death and 290 injuries. Mr. Webb Miller, wrote in the *New Freeman* :

"I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharsana. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline of the volunteers. It seemed they were imbued with Gandhi's non-violence creed."*

* India's Struggle for Swaraj p. 34.

After two hours *lathi* charge, the Imam Saheb and other leaders were arrested. Two other attempts made subsequently, were frustrated by the police by barricading the area and posting cordons round it.

Several raids were made on the Wadala Salt Depot, the raiders peacefully receiving blows from police *lathis*. Of this raid Mr. George Slocombe wrote in the *Daily Herald*:

"I watched the events from an observatory post on one of the rocky hills which ring in Wadala. It was humiliating for an Englishman to stand among the ardent, friendly but deeply moved crowd of volunteers and sympathisers and watch the representatives of his country's administration engaged in this ludicrous, embarrassing business." *

Simultaneously with violation of the Salt Act, the law of sedition and prohibitory orders were also broken. Forest laws were broken in Berar and at some places, no-tax campaign was also started. The boycott of foreign cloth and the picketing of liquor shops were vigorously pushed forward, especially by women. In Bardoli, the cultivators refused to pay rent to government, burnt their crops and migrated to Baroda. Jails were

* India's Struggle for Swaraj p. 34.

filled to overflowing and new ones had to be improvised. In Midnapore, government officers and supporters could get no supplies and buses. When a police party wanted to board a boat, six villagers jumped into it and sank it. The boycott of foreign cloth effectively checked imports and sales; in Bombay alone, it is said, thirty crores worth of foreign cloth was sealed up by the Congress. The picketing of liquor shops considerably reduced the excise revenue, which at places, fell by about 70 per cent. Although the sale of liquor outside licensed premises, and beyond prescribed hours, was condoned, wine dealers could hardly earn even the shop rents they paid.

The government now took strong action. Before the year was out, no less than twelve Ordinances had been promulgated by the Viceroy, over the head of the legislature, in order to meet what he considered to be an emergency. These Ordinances imposed humiliating restrictions on the freedom of the press, on personal liberty and security of private property and penalised even peaceful picketing of liquor and foreign cloth

shops, with a view to persuade people to abstain from them. Gandhi's Navajivan Press was confiscated and security was demanded from almost all the nationalist papers, many of which had, consequently, to suspend publication. Pilgrimage to jail was now on the rise and, by the time of the truce, according to Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, "the total figure of convictions must have reached or exceeded one hundred thousand", of whom about 12,000 were Mohammadans. The actual number of convictions in India, excluding Burma, taken mostly from official figures, was 91,124, but this does not include the convictions under sections not connected with civil disobedience.

In June, 1930, Mr. Slocombe, special correspondent of the *Daily Herald* (London) met Pt. Moti Lal Nehru a number of times to discuss the possibility of the Congress participating in the Round Table Conference. The result was that the Pandit agreed to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar acting as intermediaries between the government and the Congress on the basis of a statement drafted by Mr. Slocombe and approved by

the Pandit on 25th June, 1930. Pt. Moti Lal Nehru required an undertaking from the government that

“ they would support the demand for full responsible Government for India subject to such mutual adjustments and terms of transfer as are required by the special needs and conditions of India and by long association with Great Britain and as may be decided by the Round Table Conference.”

He would undertake to take personally such an assurance...to Mr. Gandhi and to Jawahir Lal Nehru.

If such assurance were offered and accepted, it would render possible a general measure of conciliation which should entail simultaneous calling off of the Civil Disobedience movement, cessation of the government's present repressive policy and generous measure of amnesty for political prisoners and would be followed by Congress participation in the Round Table Conference on terms mutually agreed upon.”

On 14th June, 1930, the Indian members of the central legislature met under Mr. Jayakar's chairmanship and authorised him to take steps to bring about an amicable settlement of the present impasse in the Indian political situation. In July and August, 1930, Sapru and Jayakar interviewed Gandhi and the Nehrus in their respective jails, and the

Viceroy in this connection. At last, the Nehrus and Dr. Mahmud were taken to Yaravda jail to meet Gandhi and other leaders imprisoned there and discuss matters with them and the peace-makers.

On 5th September, the peace-makers published a long statement containing a report of their work and the correspondence that took place in that connection. The Congress leaders said that they were not

“in a position to say anything authoritatively without reference to properly constituted meeting of the All-India Congress Committee. But we can say that for us, individually, no solution will be satisfactory unless (a) it recognises the right of India to secede at her will from the British Empire; (b) it gives to India complete national government, responsible to her people, including the control of defence force and economic control and covers all the eleven points raised in Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy and (c) it gives to India the right to refer, if necessary, to an independent tribunal such British claims and concessions and the like, including the so-called public debt of India, as may seem to the national government to be unjust or not in the interest of the people of India.”

In case the British government issued a satisfactory declaration to that effect, they

were prepared to recommend to the Working Committee to call of civil disobedience.

“But peaceful picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops will continue unless government themselves can enforce prohibition of liquor and foreign cloth. The manufacture of salt by the people will have to be continued and the penal clauses of the Salt Act should not be enforced. There will be no raids on Government or private salt depots.”

Simultaneously with the calling off of civil disobedience, all political prisoners, convicted or under-trial, not guilty of violence or incitement to violence should be released, confiscated properties restored, fines and securities refunded, Ordinances repealed and officers, resigned or removed on account of civil disobedience, desiring to rejoin, should be re-instated. Only after a satisfactory settlement of these preliminaries, the composition of the proposed conference and Congress participation could be decided. The government's reply, contained in the Viceroy's letter to the peace-makers dated 28th August, 1930, was considered unsatisfactory by the Congress leaders; the negotiations broke down and civil disobedience movement got a fresh impetus.



SPINNER OF THE DESTINY OF INDIA.

The government, however, proceeded with the preparation for the Conference, to which it nominated such persons, Indians and Europeans, as it thought proper. On the 12th November, 1930, the Conference met in St. James' Palace, London, the King presiding, with all the splendour the presence of the King and Indian ruling chiefs could possibly lend to it. As a protest against the unrepresentative character of the Conference and a mark of want of confidence in it, a *hartal* was observed throughout India on that date; and in spite of government's ban, processions were taken out, on which the police, as usual, made *lathi* charges and arrests. The Calcutta Corporation adjourned its meeting for the day after adopting a resolution emphatically condemning the Conference, having regard both to its unrepresentative character and the circumstances in which it was constituted. This Conference was, not the proverbial nine days', but nine weeks' wonder. The "delegates" assembled and talked and dispersed to meet again in fields fresh and pastures new. The representatives of the British political parties did not commit

themselves; the Indian nominees of the government, among whom were some prominent public men not belonging to the Congress, were in an awkward position. If they agreed to a constitution it would not be acceptable to India, unless endorsed by the Congress. The Conference concluded on January 19, 1931, after the Premier's declaration defining the British policy in India and a message from the King, saying that they had opened a new chapter in the history of India and hopefully looking "forward to an outcome which will restore peace and contentment throughout India."

The Moderates built high hopes upon these pronouncements but the people doubted the sincerity of the declarations of British statesmen. This was the inevitable result of indiscriminate arrests, convictions after trials, not in public courts, but inside jails, constant firings and *lathi* charges by the police, rule by that make-believe for a law, the Ordinances, and the incarceration of the leaders the people loved, in many cases, without even the semblance of a trial. All terrorism is branded with failure; when even

sporadic terrorism by a handful of revolutionaries sets people's face against them, organised terrorism by a powerful government is bound to create a revulsion of feeling many times stronger. It was, therefore, necessary to provide a peaceful atmosphere in India so that the government offer should receive that calm and dispassionate examination, which the gravity of the issues involved deserved. On 25. January, 1931, the Viceroy ordered the unconditional release of all the members of the Working Committee, and on the following day—the first anniversary of the day on which India had taken the vow of Independence—about thirty leaders were released and notifications declaring Congress organisations illegal were withdrawn. The released leaders, including Gandhi, hurried to Allahabad where Pt. Moti Lal Nehru was lying seriously ill—suffering from a disease he had contracted in jail. Though lying practically on his death-bed, the aged Pandit considered with his friends, the situation in the country. His condition grew worse from day to day. He was brought to Lucknow for treatment. All that human skill could

do was done, but in vain and on the 6th of February, Pt. Moti Lal Nehru passed away—a martyr in his country's cause. His grateful countrymen took his coffin in procession by road from Lucknow to Allahabad, a distance of 145 miles, all the way showering flowers on it. Gandhi, the representative of the nation, was among the chief mourners.

CHAPTER XII

THE LULL (1931)

The Liberal trio at the London Conference, Sastri, Sapru, and Jayakar had cabled to Gandhi an urgent appeal "earnestly begging him to postpone decision until we meet." To this Gandhi had agreed. They and some other "delegates" on landing immediately proceeded to Allahabad where the Working Committee was meeting with sorrow-laden hearts, but with the deep conviction that out of the ashes of Pt. Moti Lal Nehru, New India would rise sphinx-like. The strenuous efforts of these "delegates", who had London at their feet but were now standing at the door-steps of the Working Committee, to bring about an amicable settlement between the government and the Congress resulted in Gandhi asking Lord Irwin for an interview which was granted.

While Lord Irwin and some of his colleagues were trying their level best to reconcile the Indians, their liberalism found little reflection in the official world. Lord Irwin, on the one hand, was granting an interview to the arch-rebel in order to explore avenues of settlement, his subordinates, on the other, had ordered school children to turn out to watch a British regiment march by; and

“no one thought it remarkable, much less reprehensible, that in the year of grace, 1931, when India is on the threshold of responsible government, Englishmen should make themselves a party to this silly form of Prussianism.*

Gandhi's own position with regard to the Round Table Conference was explained on February 13, the eve of his meeting the Round Table Conference “delegates,” to Mr. Robert Bernays in these words:

“I see no justification in the Premier's speech for calling off the Civil Disobedience movement. I want the substance of independence, the British can keep the shadow. The Round Table Conference proposals do not give me that substance ”

In his opinion “safeguards mean that we are still regarded as not fit to govern ourselves.”

* Naked Fakir p. 105.

He thought the British army was "just an army of occupation" swallowing up half the revenue; it was unnecessary; and that New Delhi had no relation to Indian villages. He complained of the "barbaric method of the police"; he did not find "the Viceroy any more responsive than his predecessors," his stiffness and rigidity disappointed Gandhi. Asked if the British had contributed nothing to India, he smiled and said:

"I cannot say that the British have contributed anything. They have given us a sense of self-discipline, but we should have had that in any case. Undoubtedly they have given us sanitation, but apart from that, the British Raj has been nurtured in rapine and maintained by repression."*

On receipt of Lord Irwin's reply, Gandhi left for Delhi, travelling, as usual, third class. The conversations commenced on the 16th February and lasted upto the 4th March "in the friendliest possible manner and with much sweetness." The future constitution of India was from the very beginning excluded from the talk, as Gandhi had refused to recognise the necessity for safeguards. Conditions preliminary to a truce, it is believed,

*Naked Fakir p. 97.

formed the only subject of discussion. In order to be able to call off civil disobedience, Gandhi demanded enquiry into the alleged police outrages, abolition of the salt tax and the recognition of the right to peacefully picket liquor and foreign cloth shops. On the police enquiry, Bernays says that Benn

"cabled to the Viceroy the suggestion that he should agree to it.

But Irwin cannot possibly grant it. It would be the end of authority in India. I imagine the police in the dock at the mercy of a cohort of clever Indian lawyers. Police discipline and loyalty, already very severely strained, might crack altogether."*

On the 1st of March, it seemed as if all was up with the conference, the Viceroy having refused to put the whole police force of India into the dock, and to abolish the salt-tax; peaceful picketing, he thought, was legal now but such picketing as went on was anything but peaceful. Gandhi stuck to his guns. Suddenly, the Viceroy played the *Mahatma* and made a personal appeal to Gandhi, admitting his right to police enquiry which would lead only to mutual recrimination

*Naked Fakir p. 156.

to forego it, "to let bygones be bygones and to come in on the side of peace." This had an instantaneous effect and the two mystics were again closeted together to explore afresh the avenues of peace. Lord Irwin's policy had failed but his personality now triumphed. It was one of the busiest days for Gandhi. From 2-30 p. m. to 5 a. m. he was engaged in discussion, either with the Viceroy or with the Working Committee; twice he had to walk from his own lodgings at Dr. Ansari's to the Viceroy's House, a distance of five miles. At last, the truce terms were reduced to writing. In the evening, a last minute hitch was created by the government insisting on its inability to restore to the original owners forfeited lands which had passed to third parties. Both the parties and their respective Cabinets were adamant. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, however, came to the rescue and worked out a formula agreeable to both the parties. In utter darkness, Sapru went all the way from the Viceroy's House to Dr. Ansari's bungalow and, stumbling over Miss Slade's bed, reached Gandhi's cot, roused him and obtained his approval at 2 o'clock in

the morning. At last, at 8 a. m. on the 5th March, 1932, the armistice was signed by Lord Irwin and Gandhi, the representatives respectively of the mighty British Empire and the starving and half-naked millions of India; and the deep and tortuous game of the Civil Service, put to Bernays like this, was lost:

"We know Gandhi won't co-operate. I do not like these conversations, but one step leads to another. If we appealed to Gandhi to come along and help, we had to let him out of prison; and we let him out of prison, we had to let him consult with the Viceroy. It may all work out for the best. He will be manoeuvred in to such a position where, if he breaks away, he will alienate all moderate sympathy and be left with nothing but a rump of irreconcilables." *

Bernays says:

It was a supreme act of statesmanship, first in arranging the interviews and then in bringing them to a triumphant conclusion...There was no other course than to let the Civil Disobedience movement take its dreary course. Nothing could have sapped our prestige more certainly than that. In that battle we were at a hopeless disadvantage. Englishmen can stand up to open rebels. They can meet them and beat them at any time. Civil Disobedience was something far more subtle and more deadly. It was the militant suffragette movement on a

* Naked Fakir p. 145.

gigantic scale, stripped of its hysteria. It had, in fact, this tremendous difference. The militant suffragettes ended by making themselves ridiculous. The disciples of non-co-operation, as long as they kept to non-co-operation, made the Government ridiculous...Lord Irwin did not destroy the prestige of the Government. That had gone already. He did something to recreate it."

These conversations were very cordial; not unoften, the two august representatives, respectively of immense wealth and power and abject poverty and helplessness, laughed and joked. The Viceroy would ask Gandhi, if he had got his bag packed ready to go to jail, adding that he was so popular with the governor there that he missed him badly. On one occasion, Gandhi left his shawl behind, the Viceroy took it to the door, calling after Gandhi and remarking that he had not got so many clothes on that he could afford to leave any behind. Gandhi takes his meal before sunset. One evening the conversation was prolonged and Miss Slade, clad in graceful Indian *sari*, carried to the Viceroy's House, his forty dates and a pint of goat's milk which Gandhi ate in the Viceroy's study. Lady Irwin met Mrs. Gandhi and advised her to feed Gandhi up as he appeared to be

underfed. One afternoon, the Viceroy asked Gandhi to join him at tea. "Thank you," said Gandhi, unwrapping a paper parcel, "I will put some of this legalised salt into my tea to remind us of the famous Boston tea-party."

Delay has been the curse of the British in India. The government did not take advantage of the fire of enthusiasm and the momentum of good will produced by the Gandhi-Irwin pact and immediately called the second Round Table Conference. It is true, in their own history, the British have never taken the right action at the right time, they have waited on events and have often blundered into the right, but in India they have to deal with a highly sensitive people with acute minds. Subsequent events marred, to a great extent, the salutary effect of the pact.

Younger politicians were not satisfied with the pact. A group of young men hooted Gandhi after signing the armistice. The older Congress leaders addressed public meetings all over the country explaining the implications of the truce and canvassing support for it. But the continuance of conspiracy cases, the detention of Bengal internees

and, lastly, the execution of Bhagat Singh, in spite of the universal prayer for mercy, coupled with delay in starting any constructive work in order to hasten the advent of *swaraj*, lent support to the view that the government were not sincere—a view strengthened by Lord Sankey's speech in Parliament, regarding the inviolability of the safeguards which Gandhi, in his talk with the Viceroy, had understood to be open to debate. Gandhi had a "soul movement" and wrote to the Viceroy that there was no use his going to London, if the most vital of all the questions—the question of safeguards—had irrevocably been settled. The Viceroy's reply was reassuring and Gandhi proceeded to Karachi to attend the Indian National Congress.

The date of Bhagat Singh's execution had been kept secret, as the authorities were "expecting trouble all over India the day that Bhagat Singh is hanged."* All European women were warned to keep at least for 10 days within European quarters and other elaborate arrangements were made to cope with the situation apprehended. On the night

*Naked Fakir p. 226.

between the 23rd and 24th March, he was executed. The next morning the Nationalists walked out of the Assembly as a protest. This execution made Gandhi's position at Karachi most difficult. On his arrival at Karachi, on 25th March, 1932, some young men at the station waved black flags and one of them struck at his head with a flag-pole, but missed him. In the Congress itself there was opposition to Gandhi, but his speech in the Subjects Committee on the Delhi pact resolution disarmed it. The Congress ratified the truce and appointed Gandhi as its sole representative to press, before the Round Table Conference, the National Demand set forth in the Lahore resolution. The Congress also adopted a momentous resolution enunciating the "Fundamental rights of the people" and other important reforms in order "to enable the masses to realise what *swaraj*, as conceived by the Congress, will mean to them."

After the Karachi Congress, the national leaders set about implementing the terms of the armistice and stiffening the picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops, but they had to

meet official opposition almost everywhere. Complaints of the breaches of the truce by the government began to accumulate. In the meantime, Lord Irwin had left India, with the parting message :

“In thought faith,
In word wisdom,
In deed courage—
So may India be great.

“I can wish India nothing better, and so I would say to you, and to all those in this country that I have tried to serve—In your thinking, in your speaking, in your doing: God be with you.”*

Lord Willingdon had assumed the Vice-royalty, but he lacked the simplicity and frankness of Lord Irwin. It was, as Bernays says:

“all part of Lord Willingdon’s policy not to elevate Gandhi above the other Indian leaders. He feels strongly that the practice of independent negotiation can be carried too far.”

So, when Gandhi went to Simla in May, 1931, the authorities first refused permission to him to use motor-cars for himself and his friends, in spite of his being old and infirm. But on the 16th May, when he actually reached Simla,

*Naked Fakir p. 291.

the cars were after all permitted, as the authorities feared a demonstration if he walked and the police could not be spared on account of Lady Willingdon's visit to a hospital.

Gandhi saw the Viceroy; communal problem, safeguards and breaches of the truce terms were understood to be the subjects of conversation. Even the Liberals were now alarmed by Sir Samuel Hoare's speech in the House of Commons. The appalling distress of the famishing peasants had made the question of land revenue a terribly complicated one, especially in the United Provinces, where the tenantry starve in silence behind their mud walls, unnoticed by the government and the landlord. Gandhi stood up for them; the government did make some remission, but it was not sufficient. The United Provinces government was not prepared to go further, as, in its view, non-payment was due, not to inability, but to a deliberate refusal to pay, most of those who did not pay being members of the Congress.

Another wrong move of the government which had far-reaching effects subsequently is thus described by Robert Bernays:

Willingdon is deliberately trying to end the personal negotiation policy so successfully worked by Irwin. He thinks that it is a great mistake to treat Gandhi differently from any other delegate. In logic, he is right. But in practice, I think, it is a mistake. No settlement can be permanent that does not have his approval...Even Sapru—able, charming, eloquent, in every way a big man—represents nobody but himself, and would, indeed, admit as much. It is vital that personal touch with Gandhi should be maintained.”*

However, Gandhi left Simla ready to work on the Round Table Conference.

As the time for Gandhi's departure for England drew near, the situation in the country became very serious on account of the violation of the truce terms by provincial governments. Gandhi, Mrs. Naidu and Pandit Malaviya cancelled their passages to London provisionally booked for 15th August, 1931; and Gandhi sent a long letter to the Viceroy containing specific instances of prosecution for peaceful picketing on faked charges, non-release of political prisoners, realisation of fines and continuance of punitive police after the truce, failure to restore confiscated property and to reinstate resigned or dismissed

*Naked Fakir p. 320-1.

officials, dispersal of peaceful meetings, coercion in the realisation of dues from agriculturists who were unable to pay, repression of *Khudai Khidmatgars*, and maltreatment of women.

For the time it appeared as if all was over with the armistice, but suddenly the situation underwent kaleidoscopic changes. Lord Willingdon hurried back to Simla, cutting short his visit to Calcutta. Gandhi, with Patel and Nehru, also proceeded there. After prolonged and tiresome negotiations, a fresh agreement was signed by Lord Willingdon and Gandhi, on 27th August, 1931, and letters were exchanged between the latter and Mr. Emerson, reserving the right of the Congress to adopt defensive direct action in case a grievance was acutely felt and the government declined to enquire into it.

CHAPTER XIII

INDIA'S PLENIPOTENTIARY (1931)

The last train for Bombay had left Simla and the *S. S. Rajputana* was to sail on the 29th August; a special train was, therefore, provided for Gandhi. From Delhi to Bombay huge crowds besieged the train at all halting stations to wish God-speed to the nation's ambassador. At Bombay, the crowd was so enormous that Gandhi had to detrain at a way-side station and motor to Bombay. He proceeded direct to the Azad Maidan to address a mammoth meeting from a specially erected stadium provided with loud speakers. In his speech, Gandhi dwelt on his errand and its implications. He said:

"Crores of people in India do not get enough food to eat. The Congress is trying to better their lot and to help the helpless people.

I am going to London as the delegate of Truth and

Non-violence and I am confident in the hope that Truth and Non-violence will ultimately triumph in all fullness of their glory.

Looking to the country where I am going and its environments and the enormous responsibilities imposed on me, I know I should not have accepted the invitation to go. But your implicit faith in me is like the mighty Himalayas and it will shelter me from all blasts. That is my belief.

"I have great faith in God and I believe that in His sacred hand are all these developments. Anyone who has faith in God can be sure of his success. One who is weak and unprotected and goes empty-handed will, I am certain, be protected by God. Success lies in weakness and humility. Non-violence is a mighty power and that is the only power that will work effectively against tremendous odds there.

"I am going there with that trust but if I return, perchance, empty-handed, you should not be disappointed. If I return, as we hope, after achieving success, you should not become proud and haughty. Success and failure lie in the hands of God. That is certain. I have got to abide by the Congress mandate and it is upto you to see that I fulfil it. I promise that I will not disappoint you in your trust in me. If I do not keep faith with you and do not act in obedience to your mandate, you will not only drive me out of the Congress but may very rightly take more drastic steps. Even if you were to kill me for it, I will only consider

it an act of non-violence and not violence. But I do not wish to break faith with you or to deceive you in any way. How can I deceive the hapless and crippled people of India.?"

On August 29, 1931, Gandhi motored to the Mole station through crowded streets echoing and re-echoing "*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai.*" Huge crowds had besieged the station and the balconies of the buildings opposite. Congress volunteers in their *khaddar* uniforms and *desh-sevikas* in *kesari saris*, carrying national flags, formed the guard of honor for the ruler of India's heart. As Gandhi strode up the gangway, he was so profusely garlanded that his head was buried in flowers. Amidst the vociferous cheers of a crowd that had beaten all record and the earnest prayers of the dumb millions of India, the *Rajputana* raised its anchor, carrying its "precious load." Gandhi left the shores of India with this parting message to his countrymen:

"Though I see nothing on the horizon to warrant a hope, being a born optimist, I am hoping against hope. My faith is in God and He seems to have made the way clear for me to go to London. Therefore, I expect He will use me as His instrument for the service of humanity,

for to me the service of India is identical with the service of humanity...I shall endeavour to represent every interest that does not conflict with the interests of the dumb millions for whom the Congress predominantly exists.

Throughout the voyage, Gandhi received the greatest affection from the crew and the passengers. The ears of the whole world were turned towards the humming of the wireless transmitter of the *Rajputana*. Gandhi travelled by the lowest class and with the least possible luggage. To his companions he said, "We are representatives of the poorest country in the world, we have no right to go about with costly suit cases;" and from Aden they sent back seven suit cases and cabin trunks. He was the playmate of the children, who gathered round him and played all sorts of pranks with him. To the Captain, Gandhi, the old jail-bird, gave himself up as a prisoner.

One morning, after the usual prayer, in answer to a Muslim youth's request to give, not a theoretical discourse, but his personal testimony on prayer, Gandhi said:

"Prayer has been the saving of my life. Without it

I should have been a lunatic long ago. My autobiography will tell you, that I have had my fair share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into temporary despair, but if I was able to get rid of it, it was because of prayer. As food was indispensable for the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul. In fact, food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul. For stravation is often necessary in order to keep the body in health, but there is no such thing as prayer-stravation. You cannot possibly have a surfeit of prayer...Millions of Hindus and Musalmans and Christians find their only solace in life in prayer. Either you vote them down as liars or self-deluded people. Well, then, I will say, that this lying has a charm for me, a truth-seeker, if that mainstay or staff of life, without which I could not bear to live for a moment, is to be called a lie...I am not a man of learning but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer. I am indifferent as to the form. Every one is a law unto himself in that respect. But there are some well marked roads, and it is safe to walk along the beaten tracks, trodden by the ancient teachers...Let every one try and find, that as a result of daily prayer he adds something new to his life."

At Aden, the Arabs and the Indians presented Gandhi an address and a purse of 328 guineas. The Resident first declined to permit the hoisting of the national flag, but on Gandhi's refusal to receive the address,

he consented. There was quite a lot of white coarse cloth to be seen at Aden. In his reply Gandhi said:

"The National flag must be given the place of honour where Congress representatives are invited...The Congress does not stand for isolated independence which may easily become a menace to the world...It is my conviction, that India, numbering one-fifth of the human race, becoming free through non-violence and truth, can be a great force of service to the whole of mankind. On the contrary, India having no voice in her affairs is today a menace."

Gandhi's message to the Arabs, "who belong to the country of the prophet's birth" was "to make your contribution to the restoration of the peace between Hindus and Muslims in India," to make Aden dry and to "help yourself by making your own cloth", for "there is in it nothing derogatory to Islam" and "some of the Caliphs led lives which were models of simplicity."

"On happy occasion crossing Egyptian waters," Madame Zagloul sent "great leader of great India my heartiest compliments and best wishes, success Indian cause." The *Al Balagh*, the leading Egyptian journal and Nahas Pasha, the President of the *Wafd* party,

which fights for Egyptian independence, wirelessly greetings and best wishes for success. At Suez and Port Said, addresses were presented to Gandhi by Indian merchants and the representative of Nahas Pasha conveyed, by word of mouth, welcome and best wishes of the *Wafd*. Except some press correspondents, the authorities did not permit Egyptians to wait on Gandhi, lest Egypt should catch the infection of *satyagraha* from its monster bacillus.

At Marseilles "the Spiritual Ambassador of India" was welcomed by Mademoiselle Madeliene Rolland, representing her brother who was ill, Mr. C. F. Andrews, Privot and the students of Marseilles.

The students, mostly French, presented an address, welcoming Gandhi, "to bring the healing balm to the war-weary and exploitation-blinded nations of Europe." In his reply, Gandhi addressed them as friends and fellow-students and explained to them the philosophy of non-violence and the necessity of character in its followers. In the end he hoped

"that the meeting will not be the beginning and end of our acquaintance. I hope that this acquaintance

will be the beginning of a living contact between you and my countrymen. In a movement, such as we are conducting in India, we need the intellectual sympathy of the whole world, and if after a careful study of the movement and the means employed by us to attain our freedom you feel that we deserve your sympathy and support, I hope you will not fail to extend that sympathy."

The journey from Marseilles to Bolougne was an unprecedented triumphal march. At Paris, the enormous crowd of the Indians and the French enthusiastically cheered the half-clad representative of India's nudity; the train had to be detained for a few minutes for Gandhi to address the journalists who had besieged him.

On September 12, 1931, Gandhi reached London. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the brain of political India, and Mr. F. M. Vincent, representing the Secretary of State for India and others welcomed Gandhi on landing.

In London, he was taken to the Friends' Meeting House, in Euston, where London had arranged to give its welcome to Gandhi. This welcome was a clear demonstration of the fact that India's peaceful war was not a war of India against England; it was essentially

a war between the idealists in England and India against the military terrorists of England backed by landed Indian magnates. The streets and pavements around the house were seething with humanity, waiting for hours in pouring rain, to greet Gandhi in his partial nakedness, symbolising the way the capitalists of England had stripped India. As Gandhi appeared, a thunderous applause went forth. The Chairman, Mr. Lawrence Housman, and the members of the Reception Committee received Gandhi at the entrance and conducted him to the dais amidst deafening cheers from the crowd inside the Hall and outside it. Welcoming the Guest of the Nation, who was the instrument of the unification of politics and religion, the Chairman said:

"In churches we are all sinners, but in politics every one else is a sinner—that is a correct description of our daily life, and Mr. Gandhi has come to call upon us to search our hearts and to declare what our religion is."

Gandhi thanked them for "a most flattering and most embarrassing welcome," said that the Congress wanted "unadulterated freedom for the dumb and semi-starved millions of India," and assured them:

"I believe in peace, not in a peace which demands sacrifice of honor, but in peace which will vindicate honor."

He wished

"it were possible for Englishmen and Englishwomen to realise that their budget will not honestly be balanced, unless the budget between England and India is balanced."

Naturally, the die-hard Tory press adopted a hostile attitude towards Gandhi and in mendacity out-did the C. I. D. in India. The reception, both public and private, accorded to Gandhi in England demonstrated a depth of affection in which lies hope for the future. At Miss Muriel Lester's insistence, Gandhi stayed with her in Kingsley Hall, in a locality where "dramas like the submerging of a family's fortunes, the abortive efforts to get work, the attempt at suicide, the subsequent humiliation and despair are every day being enacted.*

Gandhi, was from morning till night, the centre of affection of hundreds of poor men, women and children, who surrounded the place, merely to have a look at "Gandi, merry old Gandi." His portraits appeared

*The Young India p. 282.

on the front pages of almost all dailies, with the result that even the man in the street could recognise him and when his car drew near, "waved respectfully or smiled affectionately." For Gandhi's car London suspended all its traffic regulations. Numerous letters of welcome, received from Lancashire workingmen, who were suffering through the action of the Indian National Congress, expressed profound admiration for Gandhi and his philosophy. A cotton operative wrote:

"God has chosen you to be his leader, not only for the drink-ridden Indians, who have been cruelly treated by our infamous drink-traffic, but you are by far our greatest leader and the greatest Christian, for all others are beaten with the liquor devils. I pray that you will be means in His hands of showing our drink-ridden nation that all these thousands of drink-hells (pubs) are kept going by the cotton and other workers who are fetching the wages out of the mills into the pubs and then wanting our brother Indians to purchase our goods and keep their country going as well while we boose, boose, and boose again.*

Gandhi must have been surprised to find in a military man, General Crozier, an ardent admirer of his, who presented him his book

* The Young India p. 283.

"*A Word to Gandhi*," containing one of the most unanswerable indictments of the British government that have ever been written.

At the invitation of his old friend, Bishop Fisher, the author of that interesting and illuminating book, "*That Strange Little Brown Man Gandhi*," proscribed in India, Gandhi made the first radio speech of his life on the ideals of Indian nationalism, addressed to the unseen millions of America. Said he:

"I personally would wait, if need be, for ages rather than seek to attain the freedom of my country through bloody means. I feel in the innermost recesses of my heart, after a political experience extending over an unbroken period of close upon thirty-five years, that the world is sick unto death of blood-spilling. The world is seeking a way out, and I flatter myself with the belief that perhaps it will be the privilege of the ancient land of India to show that way out to the hungry world.

He invited "all the great nations of the earth to give their hearty co-operation to India in her mighty struggle."

After this talk, a reporter said to Gandhi, "It must have cost Fisher 150 dollars." Gandhi replied with a chuckle, "Wouldn't you think a Bishop would know better than to spend that much just to talk to me."

The second Round Table Conference had commenced its work when Gandhi arrived. The first day when he attended was the day of his silence. For eleven long and weary weeks the Conference and its sub-committees dragged on. There was a down-pour of deadening oratory from all sides. The flood of oratory itself was strong enough to stem the tide of *Swaraj*, if it could at all have risen from the English Channel. In answer to George Bernard Shaw's "Does not the Round Table Conference try your patience?", Gandhi had to confess with sorrow:

"It requires more than the patience of a Job. The whole thing is a huge camouflage and the harangues that we are treated to are meant only to mark time. Why not, I ask them, make a clean breast and announce your policy and let us make our choice? But it does not seem to be in the English political nature to do so. It must go by round-about and tortuous ways."

In his more than three quarters of a dozen of pronouncements in the Conference and its sub-committees, Gandhi made his position clear, without mincing matters, that he stood for a full self-governing India nothing short of which would satisfy the Congress and the

Indian nation it represented and spoke for, and invited the government to lay their cards on the table; but the government never did so. When the representative character of the Congress was questioned by certain members and their voice was echoed by the Premier, Gandhi challenged the disputants to a referendum—a challenge which, to the Premier's utter discomfiture, remained unaccepted. Gandhi's pronouncements stood for vital principles which the Conference and its sub-committees did not at all consider. Every fundamental principle was subordinated to the communal tangle, on the solution of which, it was said, future progress of the constitutional discussion depended. To Gandhi it was putting the cart before the horse; but to the British government, aided as it was by its own convenient creatures, the communalists it had pitched into "leadership" never recognised by the people, it was a handy excuse to suspend proceedings.

The net result of this Conference was no better than that of the first one. The National Demand, embodied in the Karachi resolution was, if not expressly, at least by clear

implication, rejected in every item. In certain respects, the recommendations of the first Conference were whittled down. For example, the scope of the special protection recommended for British traders by the first Conference was widened, as the following two extracts bear out:—

First Conference.

“At the instance of the British commercial community, the principle was generally agreed to that there should be no discrimination between the rights of the British commercial community, firms and companies, trading in India, and the rights of Indian-born subjects, and that an appropriate convention based upon reciprocity should be entered into for the purpose of guaranteeing these rights.”

Second Conference.

“The committee are of opinion that no subject of the Crown, who may be ordinarily carrying on trade or business in British India, should be subject to any disability or discrimination, legislative or administrative, by reason of his age, descent, religion or place of birth in respect to taxation, the holding of property, the carrying on of any trade, profession or business, or in respect of residence or travel.”

This discrimination in favour of residents not domiciled in India is all the more marked, when one recalls the provisions of a British

Statute of 1914 regarding British nationality, section 26 (1) of which says:

"Nothing in this Act shall take away or abridge any power vested in or exerciseable by the legislature or Government of any British Possession or affect the operation of any law at present in force which has been passed in exercise of such a power, or prevent any such legislature or Government from treating differently different classes of British subjects."

British courts have also laid down that

"from the standpoint of the country of domicile, it is undesirable and even perilous to have permanently established within territory large numbers of persons who do not owe that country permanent allegiance."

In spite of the depressing atmosphere in the Round Table Conference and the strain of about twenty hours hard work per day, Gandhi not only could keep his temper but also retained his subtle humour. Asked by Mrs. Miles, if he ever suffered from nerves, Gandhi said, "Ask Mrs. Gandhi, she will tell you that I am on my best behaviour with the world but not with her." She replied, "My husband is in his best behaviour with me." "Then", retorted Gandhi, "I am sure Mr. Miles has bribed you heavily."

While he was waiting for his fellow

members in a certain Committee, a newspaper artist who was drawing his sketch with his permission, asked, "How long do you think it will be before you can convince England that India should have her freedom?" Gandhi took the sketch and adding a long beard to his clean shaven chin said, "That long."

In answer to a rather jocular question by a friend of Bishop Fisher, why Gandhi observed Monday as a day of silence, he replied:

"Fred Fisher came over to me early one Monday morning and started talking. He kept it going all day and I could not get a word edge-wise. It seemed such a pleasant experience not to have to talk at all for a whole day that I suddenly decided to adopt it as a habit."

Asked by an English student, why Gandhi was "so uncharitable to those who drink," he replied, "Because I am charitable to those who suffer from the effects of the curse."

Some one asked Gandhi. "Is not the *charkha* a mediæval device?" The reply was:

"We were doing many things in the middle ages which were quite wise. But if most of us have given them up, why accuse me of my wisdom? However mediæval the device may be, I am not ashamed of adding thereby fifty per cent to the income of my impoverished

villagers. During the war you produced potatoes and fashionable ladies of Lyceum Club invited men to stitch sleeping suits for the soldiers with plain needle and thread. Was it not mediæval? Well, I learnt the mediæval trick from the ladies of the Lyceum Club."

Sometimes he flared up and burst into a blaze, as he did in answering a question as to what the chief obstacles in the way of *swaraj* were.

"It is the unwillingness of the British officials to part with power; or our incapacity to wrest power from unwilling hands. Well, you feel sorry that I have not given you the expected reply. I want you to understand that we can wrest power in spite of our disunion, and if the hands which wield power were willing, our disunion would soon disappear. You say the British are impartial on-lookers. Well, I have had the audacity of accusing the Government of India of acting like a wedge and of accusing the British Government with having appointed a packed conference. We have our own communal solution arrived at by the Congress with enlightened Musalmans. But, if unfortunately, some Musalmans claiming to represent a majority, are not satisfied, and because of that the Government will say that they would hold on the chains they have thrown round us, I say that we shall simultaneously strike a blow to break both the chain and disunion."*

*The Young India, dated 12. November, 1931 p. 351.

If, as was expected, Gandhi achieved little at the Round Table Conference, his activities outside brought India and England closer together and established contacts, which in the long run, are bound to help India in her struggle.

To undertake to describe, however briefly, the multifarious activities of Gandhi during his twelve weeks' stay in England, the cordial receptions he was accorded in the Universities and other educational institutions and settlements, and the hearty support he received for his mission from all classes of people, especially the Church dignitaries and the working men, will fill a volume. All that can be attempted here is to give only a bird's-eye-view of some of these activities.

One of the first things Gandhi did on reaching England was to address a special meeting of Labour M. P's. in the House of Commons, disabusing their

"minds of the notion that the masses of India are enamoured of pax Britannica. The truth is that they are anxious to throw off the British yoke simply because they do not want to starve. And what else can happen when in a much more prosperous country like yours your Prime Minister does not draw more than 50 times

the average per capita income, whereas in India the Viceroy gets something like 5,000 times the average income of an Indian. And if the average income is so low you can understand that the actual income in a vast number of cases must be nil.”*

In his address to the All-Parties meeting in the House of Commons, Gandhi stated the Indian case, explaining that complete Independence did not necessarily mean isolation and exclude partnership on equal terms. Dealing with the safeguards he said:

Under the present safeguards, 80 per cent. of the revenue is to be farmed out to the foreigner and only 20 per cent. to be left to us from which we are to run the departments of education, sanitation, etc. I would not touch that Independence. I would far rather remain in compulsory subjection and declare myself a rebel than that I should take charge of a Government that I know is bound to declare itself bankrupt in say five or ten years...I would fight with my blood as a civil resister and I say I would rather that you took me to your jails and gave me *lathi* blows than pretend to ‘co-operate’ with you as a slave—which to my humble opinion is what is meant by these two safeguards.

British trade needs no protection, if it is in the interests of India. No amount of protection will help it, if it is inimical to the interests of India. Rest.

* The Young India, dated 8. Oct. 1931, p. 288.

assured that the three hundred million partners, when the weight is lifted off their shoulders, will be prosperous partners, ready to help England not to exploit a single individual or a nation but ready to help in partnership for the good of all nations. That will be a partnership which gods will descend on the earth to witness. That will be a partnership worth having and which will endure and will render some service to humanity."

Asked if he thought the Mohammadans would devour the Hindus, Gandhi replied, "Well, if they do, to be devoured by them will not be too great a price to pay for freedom."

Mr. Andrews had arranged for Gandhi a two days' visit to Lancashire. As in India, crowds gathered at stopping places, specially near Manchester, and cheered Gandhi lustily. At the places he visited, huge crowds lined the street, as they do in India. He met the employers and the operatives and had long discussions with them on Lancashire's relation to India. Gandhi said to them:

"My nationalism is not so narrow that I should not feel for your distress or gloat over it. I do not want my country's happiness at the sacrifice of any other country's happiness. But whilst I say that you are hard hit, I am afraid, your distress is not largely due to India. Conditions have been bad for some years and

the boycott came only as the last straw...As a nation we are pledged to boycott all foreign cloth, but in case of an honourable settlement between England and India, i.e. in case of a permanent peace, I should not hesitate to give preference to Lancashire cloth to all other foreign cloth, to the extent that we may need to supplement our cloth and on agreed terms...I am pained at unemployment here. But here is no starvation or semi-starvation. In India we have both. If you went to the villages of India you would find utter despair in the eyes of the villagers; you would find half-starved skeletons, living corpses. If India could revive them by putting life and food into them in the shape of work, India would help the world...You have three million unemployed, but we have nearly three hundred million unemployed for half the year. Your average unemployment dole is 70 shillings. Our average income is seven shillings and six pence a month...I do believe it is a debasing thing for a human being to remain idle and to live on doles...Imagine, therefore, what a calamity it must be to have 300 million unemployed, several millions becoming degraded every day for want of employment, devoid of self-respect, devoid of faith in God."

The result of Gandhi's visit was put thus by a working man:

"Something good cannot but come out of this. And if nothing good, no evil can come out, and good-will certainly is the immediate result. We understand each

other now. It is a privilege to have seen Mr. Gandhi, a mighty force thrown up by awakening East."

Another remarked:

"I am one of the unemployed, but if I was in India I would say the same thing that Mr. Gandhi is saying."

Gandhi said of this visit:

"We were prepared for courtesy which we expect from all gentlemen, we were even prepared for a little bitterness which distress and misunderstanding often create; but we found in stead a warmth of affection for which we were not prepared. I shall treasure the memory of these days to the end of my earthly existence"

In one of his speeches, dealing with the position of Indian ruling chiefs, Gandhi said :

"The princes may have salutes of 21 guns, may have titles, palaces and plenty of money to squander, but I suggest they are prisoners in their own palaces. Though they have power to inflict punishment on their own subjects, the sizes of their armies are limited. The uses to which their army are put are restricted, so that when the British government wishes to put its foot down on any state, it can do so with ease. Whether these restrictions are for better or for worse, the fact remains that these princes are not independent, but impotent, and so at critical moments they dare not take measures they would like to take, because residuary powers still exist with the British who are the over-lords. My whole soul

risers against this state of things, which must be broken, and the spell which the greatest secret corporation of the world, namely the Indian Civil Service, has played on us, must be lifted."

The Dean of Canterbury invited Gandhi, as quite apart from politics, they had one great interest in common, that is, religion. At the end of the evening service in the Cathedral, which Gandhi also joined, the Dean offered a special prayer, asking of God to give India the ordered liberty that England was enjoying. The Dean looked upon Gandhi as St. Francis of Assisi.

On Gandhi's visit to Birmingham, the Head of the Quaker Settlement, thanked God "that at this crisis in India's history and in world affairs, He has raised up a prophet with such gifts of moral leadership as you possess.

Gandhi appealed to Christian England, feeling certain that

"If Christian England realised the tragedy of the wrong perpetrated by the British in India, it would rise up like one man against it."

Some of the educational centres Gandhi visited were Eton, Oxford, Cambridge, Nottingham, and the London School of Economics. The Professors, the students and often

even the alumni welcomed Gandhi, honestly tried to understand him and express their sympathy with the cause he represented. This cordial contact with the England of tomorrow, and its makers augurs well for the future.

Gandhi's sixty-third birthday was a day of great rejoicings in the Kingsley Hall and outside. The little children, who played every day with "dear uncle Gandhi" presented him sweets and toys. The Independent Labour Party, the Indian National Congress League, and the Gandhi Society organised, in Westminster Palace, a lunch consisting entirely of fruits and nuts. Mr. Fenner Brockway, the chairman of these organisations, in a felicitous speech, congratulating Gandhi on his birthday, said :

"Today's birthday party is given, because those who are present feel towards Gandhiji as comrades and friends. This feeling of comradeship was even greater during the Civil Disobedience movement."

Replying, Gandhi said:

"Ever since I came to London I have experienced nothing but friendliness and genuine affection. Every day I have been making new friends. But, you have reminded me that you have been my friends in need, which surely means friends indeed. When it appeared

as though the Congress might be abandoned by everybody on earth, you stood by the Congress firmly accepting the Congress position as your own."

Referring to the fare on the table, he remarked :

"It is imagined that you have attended a lunch. My sympathies are wholly with you. I am accustomed to English lunches not through the taste but through the eyes, and when I saw this fruit-laden table, I realised what a sacrifice it was for you to take what is an apology for a luncheon."

He assured the audience :

"India does not want to spill her rulers' blood in her pursuit of freedom. But I must tell you that she does not hesitate to spill a whole Ganges-ful of her own blood in order to vindicate the claim for the freedom which has been so long delayed."

An old English spinning-wheel was presented to him on behalf of an unknown Swedish lady. When this *charkha* was brought to Gandhi's residence, his guardian detectives took it for something resembling an Indian machine-gun and would not allow it to be taken inside to Gandhi till they had satisfied themselves.

Gandhi received an invitation to a reception in the Buckingham Palace, about which he said:

"I am feeling so heart-sick and sore over the happenings in India that I have no heart in attending such functions, and if I had come in my own right I should not have hesitated to come to a decision. But, as I am a guest, I am hesitating; I can do nothing hastily. I have every moment to consider the morality of the thing and not the legality."

The morality of the thing decided him to go. He intimated in a courteous letter of thanks to the Chamberlain that he and his friends would attend the reception in their usual dress. On 5th November, Gandhi met the King for the first time since he had presented to His Majesty, on behalf of the Indian community, an address thirty years ago, when the King was the Duke of Cornwall. Immense crowds gathered at the Palace gate to greet Gandhi. As his motor arrived, there was vociferous cheering and, as the press report goes, the sentries at the gate presented arms. He had animated conversation with Their Majesties for five minutes. After his return from the Palace, some one referred to Gandhi's scanty dress. With an amused twinkle in his eyes, he said, "The King had enough on for both of us."

On account of the shortness of time at his

disposal, Gandhi could not accept invitations to visit Ireland, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Spain and America.

The Round Table Conference had finished. It had not only finished but failed, and failed because, in the words of Gandhi,

"It contains not real representatives of the nation, but merely supposed representatives. It is a packed house. I, who am representing over ninety per cent of the Indian population, am pitted against 149 or whatever the number of other delegates. So how can I prove that I overshadow the other 149? Immediately I make good the claim, you will see that my task before the Conference and the British Ministers will be easier. Unless I prove that the Congress represents the bulk of the people, I must go back and re-start Civil Disobedience. The Congress undertakes to take charge of the new Government of India, and if it does not get it by negotiation, it will get it by self-suffering, to avoid which I have been brought here by Lord Irwin."

To an Englishman asking if settlement was made impossible by disagreement among Indian representatives, Gandhi replied:

"I know you have been taught to think like that; you cannot shake off the spell of that hypnotic suggestion.

My case is that alien rulers have ruled India on the principle of "Divide and Rule." No alien Imperial rule could go on in India unless the rulers now coquetted

with one and then with the other party. We will continue to be divided so long as the wedge of foreign rule remains there, and sinks deeper and deeper. That is the way of the wedge. But take out the wedge and the split parts will instantly come together and unite.

Again, the attainment of unity has been rendered a task of herculean difficulty by the composition of the Conference itself as all the delegates here are nominated, none of them is duly elected. We are responsible to nobody, we have no constituency to appeal to.

Again, we are reminded that unless we agree among ourselves on the communal issue, no progress is possible. In the very nature of the things, therefore, each pulls it a different way and to exact the utmost he can.

Again, while the delegates are called upon to present an agreed communal solution, they are not told what they would get if they agree and so the incentive that could have made agreement beforehand possible is killed at the very start, rendering agreement very nearly impossible. Let the Government declare that they are going to withdraw from India whether Indians agreed or not and you will see that we shall then soon agree. The fact of the matter is that no one feels that he is going to get real live liberty. What is offered is simply a share in the power of bureaucracy to exploit India and this sets up an apple of discord in our midst.

If the Government at all meant business it would unhesitatingly accept my suggestion, *viz*, to appoint a judicial tribunal to decide the communal question at

issue. If this is done, there is every possibility of an agreed solution being reached, without the intervention of the judicial tribunal.

Alien rule is like a foreign matter in an organic body. Remove the poison and the body will at once start recuperating. It is preposterous to suggest that the British Government would be abdicating its function, if it withdraws from India. The only function that it is fulfilling today is of exploiting India. Let Britain cease to exploit India and India will immediately revive economically."

The failure of the Conference, coupled with the promulgation of the Bengal Ordinance, showed to Gandhi that on the part of the government there was

"no readiness to part with power; the little responsibility promised is a shadow and our difficulty in working under the handicaps would be cited as evidence against us."

CHAPTER XIV

PRISONER OF WAR (1931-1932)

Gandhi left London on the 5th December, with an enthusiastic and unprecedented send-off, by a large crowd of Indians and Englishmen. mostly adorning Gandhi caps, and singing "Auld Lang Syne" and "For He's a jolly good fellow." As the train steamed off, with Gandhi at the window of his third class carriage, smilingly acknowledging the kindness of the people, the cries of "*Bande Mataram*" and "*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*" rent the skies, as they do in India when Gandhi goes out.

He left the shores of England with these words on his lips :

"I am glad to be returning to India, but sorry to have to leave England. That is my happy condition... The English people should believe me when I say that if it falls to my lot to fight them, I will be engaged in a fight never out of hatred, but most surely out of love, even as I have fought some of my dearest relations.

Hence I am determined to make every effort to continue co-operation as far as it is consistent with national self-respect."

His parting message, published by the Commonwealth of India League, says :

"The Congress demands complete independence, including control of defence forces, external affairs and finance, not excluding equal partnership with Britain, determinable at the instance of either party, subject to a discharge or adjustment of mutual obligations.

The Congress will accept safeguards in the interests of India and is willing to take over all the legitimate obligations subject to the examination by an impartial tribunal.

The Congress is committed to a purely national solution of the question of minorities, but will, if necessary, accept the principle of special reservation of seats in the Legislatures for the Moslems and the Sikhs as a necessary evil for historic reasons.

The cause of the 'untouchables' will be a special care of the Congress and it would be unjust to treat them separately and thus give 'untouchability' a legal status when every attempt is being made to abolish the evil altogether.

"No political disability will be placed on any one on the ground of race, creed or colour, and the Congress, being wedded to adult franchise, there should be no difficulty in representatives of any minority getting

elected to the legislatures on the strength of national service."

Says Gandhi:

"Though I approached the visit in fear and trembling I am not sorry for having gone there. It brought me in touch with the responsible English men and women as also with the man in the street. This experience will be of in-estimable value in future, whether we have to put up a fight again or not. It is no small matter to know with whom you are fighting or dealing."

He was certain that,

"India will have to go through the fiery ordeal before Englishmen can be made to say: 'We are sorry, we did not do what we should have done long before.' A strong nation would not succumb so easily as we might imagine. And as one wedded to non-violence, I should not have England compelled to yield anything without a will. England must be convinced that it is good for her to yield and for India to win her freedom, before she actually surrenders power."

Asked if he still believed in the good faith of England, he replied:

"I believe in the good faith of England to the extent that I believe in the good faith of human nature. I believe that the sum total of the energy of mankind is not to bring us down but to lift us up, and that is the result of the definite, if unconscious, working of the law of love. The fact that mankind persists shows that

cohesive force is greater than the disruptive force, centripetal force greater than centrifugal. And in as much as I know only of the poetry of love, you should not be surprised that I trust the English people."

The few hours Gandhi intended to spend in Paris were expected to be hours of rest, but as he landed, a large crowd of Frenchmen, other foreigners and Indians received him with rousing cheers. Escorted by police men through the huge welcoming crowd, Gandhi could not avoid the attack of press correspondents and movie-tone company camera-men. In his hotel he was given a reception and a purse of £ 600 by the Indians of Paris. In the evening, seated on a table like the Buddha, in the biggest cinema in the city, Gandhi spoke to the citizens of Paris who had filled the hall to its utmost capacity.

On the morning of 5. December, 1931, Gandhi left for village Villeneuve in Switzerland, where on the bank of the lake, surrounded by the snow-clad Alps, in quiet seclusion lives M. Romain Rolland, a voluntary exile,

"tired of all the world has shown him, tormented by the forces of darkness that threaten to engulf European civilisation, and giving all his nights and days

to seeking a solution for the salvaging of that civilisation.”*

This pilgrimage was twice projected and cancelled though both, Gandhi and Rolland, hungered to meet each other. The meeting of these two kindred spirits it is impossible for the pen to describe. Rolland talked of truth and non-violence as he alone could talk; and exclaiming,

“How I wish I was twenty years younger, so that I might have carried on a fierce battle against the disruptive forces,” he drew near Gandhi and clasped his hands and held them tight for a while, fixing the gaze of his wonderful blue eyes on Gandhiji, like a lover on a loved one.”*

Gandhi spent about a week with M. Rolland. The Swiss villagers overwhelmed Gandhi with affection. They travelled long distances to see him and make him loving gifts, some presenting flowers, some singing him songs, some playing at violin every morning at breakfast. A woman put in Mr. Desai's hand an envelope containing a five franc piece and the message, “A little gift for one of your very poor Indian women from

*The Young India of 31. Dec. '31 p. 425.

a Swiss work-woman." Another envelope contained a twenty franc note and the letter:

"I must make the sorrow of the Indian people my own....I know what a heavy burden you are carrying and yet I cannot do otherwise but get you from the bottom of my heart to pray for us, for Switzerland and for the whole of this sad Europe."

An eighty years' old woman, weaving mats from strips of rags, aroused his great interest and he himself took a hand at the loom.

Gandhi also met Pierre Ceresole and his group. He is the son of a member of the Swiss Cabinet, who left him considerable property, all of which he gave away to the state. He is the organiser of an International Service Civile—a pacifist organisation to help people in distress, in order to wean them from international strife. He has about 800 persons, representing thirty nationalities, working in his Army of Peace. He said to Gandhi,

"I started work without any organisation, and I have never been in want of money. Money has come in some shape or another; and even our government, with whom I was once not in favour, renders us considerable help."*

* The Young India dated 31. Dec. 1931 p. 425-6.

Told that pacifists, like Einstien, advised people to decline to render military service, Gandhi said:

"Merely to refuse military service is not enough. To refuse to render military service, when the particular time arrives, is to do the thing after all the time for combating the evil is practically gone. Military service is only a symptom of the disease which is deeper. I suggest to you that those who are not on the register of military service are equally participating in the crime, if they support the state otherwise. He or she who supports a state organised in the military way—whether directly or indirectly—participates in the sin. Each man, old or young, takes part in the sin by contributing to the maintenance of the state by paying the taxes."

On this Pierre Ceresole exclaimed, "We represent *our* truth, you represent *the* truth."

Some one asked Gandhi what he thought of the International Red Cross Society, organised in Switzerland; he gave the characteristic reply:

"I am ashamed to have to own that I do not know the history of this wonderful and magnificent organisation. If it has saved prisoners by the thousands, my head bows before it. But having paid this tribute, may I say that this organisation should cease to think of giving relief after the war but think of giving relief

without the war. If war had no redeeming feature, no courage and heroism behind it, it would be a despicable thing, and would not need speeches to destroy it. But what I would suggest to you is infinitely nobler than war in all its branches, including Red Cross Organisation. Believe me there are many more million prisoners—slaves of their passions and conditions of life—and believe me that there are millions wounded by their own folly, and millions of wrecked homes on the face of the earth. The peace societies of to-morrow would, therefore, have enough work cut out for them when they take up international service and may Switzerland give the lead to the world in this great task.”

The conscientious objectors gave Gandhi a wonderful welcome in a church. The touching address said:

“We are afraid of the unknown, prison, responsibility, death. You know no fear. We have got the Sermon on the Mount on our lips. You have got it in your heart and are living it. Welcome in our midst and teach us to live more dedicated lives.”

In this meeting, asked why he regarded God as truth, Gandhi gave a long discourse proving God is Truth and Truth is God. For him truth is, “what the voice within tells you.” But

“Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in

the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Every one should, therefore, realise his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice."

This discipline consists of the five vows of truth, purity, non-violence, poverty and non-possession and of several other conditions, the most important of which is humility, for

"truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourself to a zero."

At Geneva, over two thousand people assembled in the Victoria Hall to listen to Gandhi at the lunch hour, at the sacrifice of their meal. Speaking on the League of Nations, he said:

"You have in this city of yours the central office of the League of Nations. That League is expected to perform wonders. It is expected to replace war, and by its own power, to arbitrate between nations who might have differences amongst themselves. But it has always seemed to me that the League lacks the necessary sanctions. It depends, as it has to, largely if not exclusively, for its decisions to be effective, on the good will of the nations concerned. I venture to suggest to you that the means we have adopted in India supply the necessary sanction, not only to a body like

the League of Nations, but to any voluntary body or association that would take up this great cause of the peace of the world."

On the 11. December, Gandhi crossed the Swiss frontier and on a friend's insistance, proceeded to Rome in a reserved third class compartment. At Milan, the authorities offered a first class carriage free and it was accepted. Two orientlists of note presented him their books, with the words, गान्धवे सर्व भूत हिते रताय, "to Gandhi, devoted to the welfare of the whole creation," and गान्धवे महात्मने नमोनमः, "many obeisances to Gandhi, the high souled," inscribed on them.

Next morning Gandhi reached Rome. He was the recipient of overflowing affection, not only from his host General Moris, a friend of Rolland and formerly head of civil aviation in Italy and the countless friends who met at the General's house, but also from the crowds that followed him wherever he went. He met Mussolini, and the members of the government. They all seemed interested in India's experiment with non-violence.

Gandhi gave about two hours to the Vatican. Gandhi stood in silence before a

statue of Jesus on the Cross, "which is capable of moving the stoniest heart," circumambulated it and said, "One can't help being moved to tears." After the visit, Gandhi, referring to the statue, said:

"And what would not I have given to be able to bow my head before the living image at the Vatican of Christ crucified? It was not without a wrench that I could tear myself away from that scene of living tragedy. I saw there at once that nations, like individuals, could only be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way. Joy comes not out of infliction of pain on others but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself."

Another sculpture that arrested his attention was a giant man with prosperity in one hand and ears of corn in another, and numerous little urchins dancing on his massive body. "It is Ganges," exclaimed Gandhi.

A daughter of Tolstoy, full of energy and spirit, in spite of the weight of years, sought him out and said,

"I have been long looking forward to an opportunity of meeting you. If my father had been alive he would have been delighted to hear of your non-violent battle for freedom."

Gandhi enquired if she was the daughter

who wrote that famous letter of her father to him, but that was another daughter.

Shortly before his departure for Brindisi, Gandhi had a surprise visit from Princess Maria, the youngest daughter of the Italian king. She talked with Gandhi for half an hour. She also attended his evening prayer.

On 14. December, 1931, Gandhi sailed from Brindisi by the *Pilsna*. As he was climbing the ladder to embark on the boat, the following address was read out to him:

"Mahatma! History and Art Amateurs' Association in Brindisi bows to you. And as in 1925 to your great friend Rabindranath Tagore it offered to drink in a cup of the fifth century before Christian era, in the same manner and in the same cup it is offering you milk, your daily food, from which you have the vigour for your apostolate of redemption and justice."

"Is the milk goat's milk?" Gandhi smilingly asked. "It is goat's milk, it is goat's milk," several voices shouted in Italian. And Gandhi drank the milk out of that cup of the fifth century before Christ.

Gandhi landed at Bombay on 28. December 1931. On the last day at sea, Gandhi said to Reuter's correspondent, what he had

emphasised in his utterances and writings after leaving England :

As I approach the shores of India I am weighed down with a sense of tremendous responsibility even as I was upon approaching London. Only, this time the responsibility is a thousandfold greater. I shall therefore take no hasty step. I shall exhaust every resource at my disposal, before advising India once more to go through the fire of suffering.

I am constantly praying for God's guidance. I know He will not fail me, if I remain true to my creed. Thank God, my faith in truth and non-violence for national purposes has become strengthened by my European visit, if there was any room for further strengthening. I have no other end to serve in this life.

The crowds at the pier and on the whole route to Gandhi's residence gave him an enthusiastic reception unparalleled in the history of Bombay. In the evening, he addressed, at the Azad Maidan, a meeting in size unequalled in the history of mammoth meetings. Welcoming Gandhi on behalf of the nation, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Congress President, said :

"Mahatmaji, you have returned empty-handed. But we are not sorry for it. You went against your own wishes in deference to our wishes. You have now

demonstrated to the world more strongly than ever the determination of India to be free."

Referring to the news, he received on landing, of the arrest of Jawahar Lal Nehru and Sherwani, for leaving their respective places of residence to attend the Working Committee meeting at Bombay, and of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, whose only offence was that he converted a turbulent martial people with an unbroken record of fighting, to the creed of non-violence without destroying fearlessness, strength and manliness and to the firing at Peshawar resulting in the death of innocent and unarmed persons, Gandhi said :

I take it that these are all Christmas gifts from Lord Willingdon, our Christian Viceroy. For, is it not a custom during Christmas to exchange greetings and gifts. Something had to be given me and this is what I have got."

With regard to the future he said :

"I repeat again, I had hoped that it would be possible to find a way to co-operate with the Government. I will even now do my best to find the way out. But I must admit the signs that I have noticed have considerably weakened my hopes. And if ever we have to fight, we should be prepared to do our utmost. Ours is a fight, in which one and all can join. It is a fight of court sufferings. It is a struggle to give life and not

to take life. In this struggle even children can play a part. Last year we faced *lathis*, but this time we must be prepared to face bullets. I do not wish that the Pathans in the Frontier alone should court bullets. If bullets are to be faced, Bombay and Gujerat also must take their share. I had said in London that if we have to offer even a million lives for achieving freedom, I would be prepared for sacrifice without the least compunction. I believe that we must get rid of the fear of death, and when we have to court death, we must embrace it as we embrace a friend. But in spite of our readiness to offer our lives, we must see to it that not even a hair of an Englishman is hurt. We must hope that by our sacrifice we shall be able to bring about a change of heart in the same Englishman who strikes us."

At night, Gandhi was the guest of honour at a meeting of the Welfare of India League presided over by Sir Stanley Reid. Gandhi originally intended to speak on his experiences in England, but the situation created in India by repression weighed him down and he confined his address to it and ended by saying :

"I am dying for co-operation and shall not rest till I have explored all avenues. I appeal to you English men and women to ponder over the facts I have placed before you tonight and do your bit for creating an atmosphere of love and peace in this country."

The next three or four days were very important days in the history of British India. The Congress Working Committee met to hear Gandhi's report and consider it and the situation created in the country by the promulgation, by Lord Willingdon, of thirteen Ordinances, "more drastic," as Winston Churchill said, "than any that were required since the Mutiny," the sending of Congress leaders to jail and the shooting of innocent men in the Frontier Province. Gandhi wired to the Viceroy seeking an interview, but Lord Willingdon refused. British Imperialism, confident of its strength in brute force thus spurned the appeal of Indian poverty for mutual understanding and good-will at a time when it was professed that India was about to embark on a big constitutional advance. The Working Committee passed a number of resolutions on the matters before it and called upon the nation to resume civil disobedience under very strict rules it framed so as to ensure non-violence and protect non-combatants from harm. It also invited

"the free people of the world and their Governments to watch and study the progress of the movement and if they are convinced of the justness of the unique

means adopted by the Congress for reaching the national goal, to give to the movement their enlightened support in a greater and more effective measure than heretofore;"

opining that,

"the non-violent method adopted by the Congress gives it a world-wide importance and if the method becomes demonstrably successful it is likely to furnish an effective moral equivalent for war and thus make a lasting contribution to the progress of humanity groaning under the dead weight of armaments."*

Thus the new year began with resumption of hostilities between Imperialism and Soul-force. Amazing was the response from the people. Even the loyalists were considerably agitated, and those who so far kept out of politics felt that they could keep out no more. Deputation after deputation from various bodies waited on Gandhi with offers of help. Many Europeans were ashamed of the Viceroy's reply.

Gandhi was unperturbed. While arrests were being made in hundreds and thousands throughout the country and he himself was expecting arrest every moment, he despatched presents for the English detectives who guarded him in England and on the continent.

*Young India, dated 14th January, 1932, p. 20.

The Welfare of India League satisfied itself that Gandhi had an open mind and wired to the Viceroy to grant him an interview, but with no result. Leading Liberals also tried, but failed. The government had made up its mind to pile blunder upon blunder.

On the morning of 3rd January, 1932, in his prayer meeting, Gandhi delivered this message to his people :

“You have been my companions in these prayers for some days, and now that the struggle is resumed again and I may be taken away any moment, I hope you will continue to have your prayers regularly morning and evening. Let it become a daily obligatory ritual for you. Prayer plays a large part in a self-purificatory sacrifice and you will see that it will be veritable cow of plenty for you, and will make your way clear. The more you apply yourselves to it, the more fearlessness you will experience in daily life, for fearlessness is a sign and symbol of self-purification. I do not know a man or a woman who was on the path of self-purification and was still obsessed by fear. Generally, there are two kinds of fear in men’s minds, fear of death and fear of material possessions. A man of prayer and self-purification will shed the fear of death and embrace death as a boon companion and will regard all earthly possessions as fleeting and of no account. He will see that he has no right to possess wealth when misery and pauperism

stalk the land and when there are millions who have to go without a meal.

No power on earth can subdue a man who has shed these two fears. But, for that purpose, the prayer should be a thing of the heart and not a thing of outward demonstration. It must take us daily nearer to God, and a prayerful man is sure to have his heart's desire fulfilled, for the simple reason that he will never have an improper desire. Continue this ritual and you will shed lustre not only on your city but on our country. I hope this brief prayer of mine will find a lodgment in your hearts."

At night when everybody was in bed, the police chief asked for control of the telephone and stopped all egress from and ingress to Gandhi's residence. Gandhi simply smiled when Devadas, his son, woke him up and told him that the escort to take him to His Majesty's Guest-house had arrived. Gandhi wrote out this message for the nation:

"Infinite is God's mercy. Never swerve from truth and non violence, never turn your back and sacrifice your lives and all to win *Swaraj*."

It was Gandhi's day of silence. To Father Elwin, sitting close by, he wrote:

"I am glad you have come. I would like you yourself to tell your countrymen (Englishmen) that I love them even as I love my own countrymen. I have

never done anything towards them in hatred or malice, and, God willing, I shall never do anything in that manner in future.

I am acting not differently towards them now from what I have done under similar circumstances towards my own kith and kin."

Gandhi was arrested under the ancient, rusty Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827 under which any person, howsoever innocent, can be arrested and detained indefinitely without assigning any reason.

The government clapped Gandhi into jail because it regarded him as a menace to peace. But wrote Gandhi:

"For me patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane. My patriotism is not exclusive. I will not hurt England or Germany to serve India. Imperialism has no place in my scheme of life."

When Gandhi was free and his movement was at its height, all crime had touched the lowest point ; since his incarceration crimes not only of terrorism, but also of theft and dacoity, have been on the increase. Gandhi free is a great asset for peace, he has "awakened the Indian people to a national ethical system."* He is the greatest bulwark

* Gandhi, the Holy Man p. 146.

against the great modern incentive to force, Bolshevism, hovering over the world. Though he has dedicated his life to the service of the poor, when Arthur Holitscher drew his attention to the injuries inflicted by capitalism adding that this evil could only be destroyed by force, Gandhi replied :

"I would not destroy capitalism, I would only change its temporary form—its essence I cannot destroy, because I offer it no resistance."*

To M. N. Roy, he said :

"I believe in the conversion of humanity, not in its destruction...The faith of Bolshevism is ruthless self-indulgence, whereas *satyagraha* means self-restraint." †

His imprisonment has shocked the Christian world. The Bishop of Madras frankly confessed

"although it deeply grieves me to say it, that I see in Mr. Gandhi, the patient sufferer for the cause of righteousness and mercy, a true representative of the crucified saviour than the men who have thrown him into prison yet call themselves by the name of Christ." ‡

* Ibid p. 120.

† Ibid p. 120.

‡ Ibid p. 43.

CHAPTER XV

UPLIFT OF THE DOWN-TRODDEN (1932-1933)

While in London, Gandhi discovered that the British government was playing with India with a loaded dice. Without laying its cards on the table the government, backed by the Round Tablers it had selected mostly for the well-known extremism of their communal bias and the lack of sacrifice for the country, insisted on the settlement of the minorities question as a condition precedent to further progress, in utter disregard of its own and India's responsibility as signatories to the minorities pact of the League of Nations. When he found that a "perpetual bar sinister" was sought to be created against a section of the Hindus and fleeting social untouchability was going to be perpetuated as political untouchability, he declared

“with all the emphasis I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing, I will resist it with my life.”

On his return to India, he had hoped “to mobilize public opinion against separate electorates, at any rate for the Depressed classes. But it was not to be.”

When the British government's decision on the communal question was imminent, Gandhi wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare, on the 11. March, 1932 saying,

“Separate electorate is harmful for them and for Hinduism whatever it may be from the purely political standpoint...So far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electorate would simply vivisect and disrupt it...”

...I, therefore, respectfully inform His Majesty's Government that in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, I must fast unto death,”

even at the cost of causing grave embarrassment to the government, and of being accused of introducing into the political field methods which may be regarded hysterical, if not worse But

“All I can urge in defence is that, for me, the contemplated step is not a method, it is a part of my being. It is a call of conscience which I dare not disobey, even

though it may cost whatever reputation for sanity I may possess."

Gandhi also informed him of the possibility, not remote, of another similar fast against government terrorism, under which

"Both English and Indian officials are brutalised. The latter, high and low, are becoming demoralised by reason of Government regarding as meritorious disloyalty to the people and inhuman conduct towards their own kith and kin. The former are becoming cowed down. Free speech has been stifled. *Goondaism* is being practised in the name of law and order; women, who have come out for public service, stand in fear of their honour being insulted."

On April 13, 1932, the Secretary of State replied that the government decision would be given after they had taken into account, the view of the Franchise Committee they had appointed, "and the views that you and those who think with you have so forcibly expressed."

For over four months, the British government slept over this correspondence. In fact, suggestions in the daily press that the government was in correspondence with Gandhi were officially contradicted. The public in India and in England was quite

ignorant of the fiery ordeal Gandhi was to pass through, and Gandhi was enjoying his enforced rest, spinning industrially in the Yaravda jail. When his right hand struck work, he spun the thread with his left.

At last on August 17, 1932, the long-looked-for decision of the British government announcing the division of the electorate to the future legislatures of India into multifarious water-tight communal compartments and the cutting up of the Hindu community into two practically isolated groups, condemning one to perpetual political untouchability, disturbed Gandhi's peace of mind and caused to India an anguish, a parallel of which the world has not witnessed during the last two thousand years. On the following day, Gandhi communicated to the Prime Minister his resolve to resist the government decision "by declaring a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind, save water with or without salt and soda" with effect from the noon of September 20th. The fast would cease on the withdrawal, by the government, either *suo motu*, or under pressure of public opinion, of its scheme of separate electorate for the

depressed classes. He asked the authorities to cable the letter to the Premier.

The Premier's reply, written three weeks after, was hardly worthy of the late leader of the Labour party. It was a laboured defence of the ingenious device of double votes for the depressed classes, which, while apparently meeting Gandhi's point of view, was really strengthening the divisive tendency of separate electorate. The Premier had the audacity to question Gandhi's *bona fides* and to charge him with hostility towards the depressed classes. He declared his inability to change the decision.

Gandhi's rejoinder of the 9th September re-affirmed his resolve.

After four days, the entire correspondence appearing in the dailies, came to India as a bolt from the blue. The whole country, with one voice, demanded the revision of the government's decision; and with reckless courage and super-human effort routed the centuries-old citadel of untouchability. Sympathisers all the world over deluged Gandhi with messages. The world was ringing for a whole week with prayers for Gandhi's life.

As suggested by Rajagopalachari, the Congress President, and Malaviyaji, the people all over the country held mass meetings on the 19th September, demanded the withdrawal of the disruptive electoral scheme and offered prayers for Gandhi and observed the 20th as a day of fasting and prayer. In millions of homes stoves were not lit that day.

News of throwing open temples, wells and other public places, to the "untouchables," henceforth called the *Harijans*, (God's own people,) came like the mighty Ganga. The orthodox out-did the reformers in fraternising with the *Harijans*.

The people expected the government to atone for its long suppression of the Gandhi-Hoare correspondence, by setting Gandhi free to bring about an amicable settlement of the electoral question between the *Harijans* and the other Hindus; but the government was not prepared to part with its priceless possession and preferred to keep him in the Yaravda jail, giving him special facilities for medical and nursing attendance and interviews.

The epic fast commenced with prayers on

the 20. September, 1932, exactly at noon.

Hindu leaders rushed to Bombay to seek avenues of averting the greatest calamity staring India in the face. Their conference opened on the 19. September. The negotiations between the leaders of the *Harijans* and the other Hindus dragged on their weary course and at times, it appeared, they were on the breaking point. But the will to succeed and save Gandhi's life predominated. There were frequent and prolonged interviews between the leaders and Gandhi, which heavily taxed his ebbing strength. On the 23. September, Gandhi took a turn for the worse; on the following day was the Poona Pact signed in Gandhi's presence by the leaders of the *Harijans* and the other Hindus and the Congress leaders participating in the negotiations. It was communicated to the authorities.

"It showed Britain and the world that Hinduism still has social vitality and cultural homogeneity and can still mould and determine its political destiny by its own efforts."*

What is true of Hinduism is truer of the Indian nation.

Gandhi would not break his fast till the

*The Epic Fast. p. 218.

government communicated its acceptance of the Pact. On the morning of the 26. September, the doctors declared that Gandhi had definitely entered the danger zone adding that there was danger even if the fast was broken.

At 4-15 p. m., in came the Inspector-General of Prisons and handed over to Gandhi the government communique, which fulfilled the letter and the spirit of his vow. The fast was now broken amidst prayers, music and rejoicings. But Gandhi warned the Hindus that he would resume the fast, if the complete removal of social and religious disabilities of the *Harijans*, "is not relentlessly pursued and acheived within a measurable period."

There were universal rejoicings and thanks-giving services in the country on the following day, which happened to be Gandhi's birthday, according to the Hindu calendar.

An All-India Association was formed, with influential support, for the complete removal of untouchability. It has its branches in every part of this vast sub-continent, and has, within a few months of its existence,

cleared much of the debris of the crumbled fortress of untouchability.

In a birthday interview to the press Gandhi stated:—

"I am, by instinct, a co-operator; my very non-co-operation is intended to purge co-operation of all meanness and falsity...No one would be more delighted than I would be to endorse any worthy suggestion for co-operation by the Congress with the government and with the Round Table Conference. I would only emphasise and underline the adjective worthy...."

Far from taking advantage of the "Yaravda spirit," so clearly and forcefully demonstrated by Gandhi—a spirit which had fired the country—the government re-imposed on Gandhi, the old jail restrictions on the 30 September, about which, says Mr. Benn, ex-Secretary of State for India :

"The crowning piece of stupidity came last week. Mr. Gandhi had placed himself in a new and higher position in the esteem of his fellow countrymen. But the prison door was banged on him again when the government thought that the risk of the public becoming upset was over. There is only one way to deal with India. We must go back to the methods of peace—and if you give what India asks and what she ought to have, you can have peace."

On the 7th November, 1932, the government removed all restrictions imposed upon Gandhi regarding visitors, correspondence and publicity in matters strictly relating to the removal of untouchability.

Another similar "tussle with God" Gandhi had promised to undertake on the 2nd January, 1933, in sympathy with Sjt. Kelappan, for getting the Guruvayur temple opened to *Harijans*, has happily been averted, for the present, as a result of a referendum, in which the people, against whom Gandhi proposed to fast, overwhelmingly voted for temple entry.

Explaining the fast, Gandhi says, "it is a "purely spiritual act and, therefore, not capable of being fully explained" and that "it is intended to stir the public conscience." He continues:

"Hinduism teaches that when evils and corruption are beyond control by ordinary means, human endeavour is supplemented by *tapasya* or penance which, in its extreme form, means fasting either conditional or unconditional...

My conviction is that Hinduism has fallen from the purity and vitality it had once had. Its very scriptures are evidence of its continuous progress and

its adaptability to circumstances that arose from time to time...But a time came when this healthy growth or evolution was arrested, and instead of the written word being used as an aid to the search for light from within, it was held to be all-sufficing whether it accorded with the longings and strivings of the spirit within or not... I may be wrong in my diagnosis, but such being my case and finding Hindu society irresponsive to the Central call of Hinduism, that is, the progressive realisation of the unity of all life, not as a philosophical doctrine but as a solid fact of life, I thought that, by continuous effort to live my religion as I understood it, I had the fitness for doing penance by way of fasting and that I had such a call from within.

‘I hope it is easy for the reader to see that there is no coercion behind a fast thus received...It would be only out of the ashes of untouchability that Hinduism can revive, and, thus purified, become a vital and vitalising force in the world’.

For over a year Gandhi has been in jail; India has been under the rule of Ordinances promulgated by the Viceroy under his emergency powers, conferring drastic powers on the police and the magistracy; all the Congress organisations nearly have been declared unlawful, their funds and properties confiscated and members to the tune of a hundred thousand jailed and fined, sometimes

unconscionably heavily; firing has been resorted to in more than 37 cases, resulting in no less than 88 deaths and 322 wounded* and at places, whole villages, towns or communities have been penalised, for instance, the Hindus of Chittagong. Yet the net result, in the words of the venerable Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya is :

“Despite the most strict enforcement of the Ordinances against the Congress organisations, the very fact that the Congress session was held at Delhi and numerous political conferences held in districts and sub-divisional towns all over the country shows that the Congress spirit is unsubdued and the Congress has not ceased to function. Let not the Government lull itself into the belief that the people’s spirit has been subdued merely because it has succeeded, by *lathi* charges, in preventing peoples’ physical presence in open demonstrations...

The result of the government’s relentless policy of repression has been that never before have I known such bitterness against the Government as today. Never the relations between the Europeans and the Indians were more estranged than today. Their business has suffered enormously and they do not feel happy in such a lamentable state of atmosphere.

We do not want this atmosphere. We want

* Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly on 8. September, 1932, appearing in the dailies.

honourable relationship being established between the Britishers and the Indians. In the interests of peaceful atmosphere in the country it is desirable that this policy of aloofness is changed. I would, therefore, request those in power to consider and decide whether the time for holding the olive branch to the people had come. If the Government pursued the present policy, it would find that there are some men who are sworn to keep the flame of the Congress burning regardless of any loss or suffering to which they may be exposed.”*

The government has also been going forward, in its own way, with its scheme of devising political reforms for India; but it has failed to catch the imagination of the people. What the people think of this policy is well depicted by Dr. Rabindranath Tagore in his letter to the Chairman, India Conciliation Group, London:

“It is too late in the day for the government to throw out mere gestures of good-will, palliative measures and tactful promises, safeguarded by diplomacy. The government must reverse its weak policy of repression and intimidation and come out with concrete proposals which can immediately be made operative, giving India the substance of independence. Honest constitutional

*P. Madan Mohan Malaviya's Calcutta speech, on 2. September, 1932, reported in the *Leader* and the *Hindustan Times* of 4. September, 1932.

reforms, sweeping aside the heaped up follies of Government must be preceded by the release of Mahatma Gandhi and the members of the Congress and the unconditional repeal of the Ordinances which are a frank confession of the government's failure to rule."*

The government is prepared to release Gandhi, if he gives an undertaking not to participate in civil disobedience. But Gandhi who recognises no law except the still small voice within, is the last man to give any such undertaking. It is, perhaps, inevitable that, under the present circumstances, Gandhi should remain in prison. In these days of civilised Mammon-worship, one who spurns the 'god' of the day and clings to the God of Eternity, and combines in himself the humility of a Christ, the austerity of a Buddha, the earnestness of a Muhammad, the self-sacrifice of a Rantideva, the activity of an Arjuna, the truthfulness of a Harishchandra, the *bhakti* of a Prahlad, the *dharma* of a Yuddhishtira and the *ahimsa* of a Mahavir, has no place to live except in jail, the birth place of Shri Krishna.

* The I. D. T. of 22. October, 1932, p. 8 col. 4.

CHAPTER XVI

GANDHI AND THE SPIRIT OF INDIA

"The whole nation follow him (Gandhi) implicitly, and for one reason only, that they believe him to be a saint. To see a whole nation of different races, of differing temperaments and ideals, joining hands to follow a saint, that is a modern miracle and only possible in India."

When Rabindranath Tagore said this, he was looking at the reason of Gandhi's popularity with the eyes of a poet and not of an observer of facts. Miracles are the monopoly of poets and prophets, but Gandhi is neither, in the popularly accepted sense of the terms. Gandhi is a man of the world, a matter-of-fact world and not an imaginary world. Historical and psychological causes have made his lead inevitable and hence, universally accepted in India. He is what Emerson said of Napoleon in relation to

France, the great ideal soul of his country and every Indian is just a little Gandhi. The qualities of his character, the moral weapons that he uses, the spirit of his daily living, represent what India wants to be. His very sentiments are rooted deep in the traditions of his people. Gandhi is a biological necessity at this stage of India's march through eternity.

The Indian people framed their laws and institutions æons prior to the insect origin of yesterday of the British. On the far, far off horizon of time, when history faded into mythology, there twinkled many a star, all but one of whom—India—have passed out of our vision. India brightened the dead past, she still illumines the living present. Babylon, Egypt, Greece and even Rome live but in names; India, with her at least six thousand years old culture, still lives in reality. Wave after wave of foreign invaders swept over her, but religiously, culturally and biologically she has remained unconquered. These invaders came to India, as rivers flow into the ocean, to merge themselves into it. India, like the ocean, absorbed the new cultures

they had brought and continued unchanged her own serene existence.

The reason for India's imperishability is that she lives in the soul and not merely in the body. Outward changes, inevitable as they are in an ever-changing world, do not, cannot disturb her inner life. India's ancient polity is based, not on the greatest good of the greatest number, but as the Gita says, on *sarva bhoot hit*, "the good of all that exists." India believes not in the right of the strong alone to live, even at the cost of the weak, but in the right of all to exist, the strong having further the duty cast upon them to protect, and not to exploit, the weak.

The Indian is traditionally a republican; autocracy and bureaucracy are pathological growths, he cannot put up with. The Vrishni-Yaudeha and the Lichhavi republics are only two instances out of the many that flourished on a large scale. The village and the caste republics flourished till recent times; the caste republic survives, to some extent, even to the present day. Independence is the essential condition of the Indian's spiritual life. In his Daily Prayer, he has a clause praying for

independence. The ideal of independence is present before the Indian mind, sub-consciously, if not always consciously, and independence it has always regained, not only intellectual, but also political.

Indian monarchy, too, was a limited monarchy, limited to a greater extent than the British monarchy. The king was not above the law. The Vedic coronation brought home to the King that he was the people's servant and the law was above him;* it could destroy him if he transgressed it. In fact, the Pauranic literature is replete with instances of wicked kings destroyed for the transgression of the law. He was elected by the people, including even the Sudras. The King was charged in these words:

"To thee this State is given; thou art the director and regulator; thou art steadfast and bearer (of this responsibility); to thee (this state is given) for agriculture, for prosperity, for development "†

The king was not the owner but the trustee of the country.

"The purport of the Smiriti is that king's sovereignty is for correcting the wicked and fostering the good.

* *Manu* VII.

† *Satpatha*, V, 2, I, 25, quoted in *Hindu Polity*.

Hence the land is not king's wealth. On the other hand in that land (state land) there is the common wealth of all living beings to enjoy the fruit of their labour." *

Even the mighty king Asoka had no absolute control over the public purse; on one occasion he deplored that money was not voted for his missionary propaganda. The people's assembly was the sovereign and the people's welfare, the sole concern of the state. This tradition is ingrained in the Indian mind; centuries of foreign rule have not succeeded in removing it.†

During the Mohammadan rule, the power of the king had failed to touch the institutions of the country, which continued to flourish as they had done before. The life of cities and towns felt the change of rulers, but life in villages, which form real India, generally went on as before. Thus, the people managed their own affairs through their chosen leaders, the members of the village and caste *panchayats*, trade-guilds and ascetic *sanghas*. The Mohammadans came and made India their home. Their religion taught them

*Nyayamala, quoted in Hindu Polity.

†For a detailed study of this subject, the reader is referred to K. P. Jayaswal's Hindu Polity.

independence and democracy. The protection of their neighbour was an important commandment of the Koran. Time rounded off the angularities of the Aryan and the Semitic; their respective cultures were enriched by the impact. In fact, even in cities and towns, to which alone Muslim influence was confined, there sprung up a new culture, the synthesis of the best in both.

An alien people, ruling a country from a distance of six thousand miles, cannot, from the very nature of things, afford to leave the villages untouched. They must set up an efficient machinery to govern the people in order to maintain their supremacy. Their government is bound to be highly centralised and when the centre happens to be thousands of miles away from the governed, in spite of the most genuine and the deepest sympathy, it is impossible to look at things from the people's point of view. Add to this an overweening sense of superiority of their own civilization and an apprehension of an age-long culture throttling their own baby-culture, and it becomes but inevitable for such a government to spread its network over every nook

and corner of the country and every sphere of life of the people. When this is done at a time when the country is torn by civil dissensions and fire and death are rampant; when the foreign culture is imposed, not with the sword, but peacefully and with the declared intention of bringing peace and contentment to the land, by a people expert in the art of diplomacy, the result is bound to be the consolidation of the foreign power and the tacit admission of superiority and consequent acceptance, by the people, of foreign institutions and culture. But an exotic plant is often unnatural; it draws little nourishment from the soil, persistent indigenous vegetation, especially when the roots have gone deep into the soil, soon asserts itself.

In order to keep the soul, it is necessary to maintain the body. A desire to live is incompatible with starvation. This is as true of a nation as of an individual. India was, therefore, careful to see, when she was politically independent, that adequate supply of the necessities of life is assured to her people. She did not want to exploit other peoples, but she also never bled herself white for them.

In order to make her people rich, happy and contented, India set a limit to her taxation, adopted a judicious system of foreign trade and provided an independent judiciary which could dispense justice free of cost.

"Taxes had been fixed by law and the scales had been embodied in the sacred Common Law."* The general principle of taxation was that "the ruler should act like a bee which collects honey without causing pain to the plant."† The taxes were not to be realised by a painful mode. The Mahabharat says, "Milch the cow but do not bore the udders." The tax on agriculture never exceeded one-sixth of the produce and that on industries and trade, one-tenth of the profits. "The principle of excise or counter-vailing duty was resorted to in certain cases."‡ The revenue raised was under the control of the Council of Ministers. The highest limit of taxation was so rigid that Chandragupta had to request the people to pay him money as *pranaya*, "a tax of affection," to meet the

*Hindu Polity part II p. 161.

†Ibid p. 166.

‡Ibid p. 168.

cost of his war with Seleukos ; he could not levy a new tax nor raise the scale of existing taxes. That the people readily responded is proved by the result of the war. A contented and patriotic people will always gladly offer their all to a benevolent ruler at such emergencies.

Taxes were regarded as wages of the state for the service of administration

“The theory that the taxes were wages for protection was so ingrained in the constitution that even partial failure of protection was deemed to entitle the subject to claim refund of wages in proportion to the loss...The tie of allegiance is deemed dissolved the moment the king failed to fulfil his duty of protection, and the subject was free to employ another servant master instead.”*

The export of beneficial articles, like weapons and armours, metals, military vehicles, rare things and, above all, grains and cattle, was prohibited, while their imports were encouraged by not being taxed at all. Exports which caused “artificial” prosperity by driving up prices, and imports harmful to the state and luxuries were discouraged by taxation. Rare articles and articles which could be seed

*Hindu Polity part II p. 164.

for future production were imported free. Economic enemies like public women, gambling establishments and gamblers, theatrical and similar parasites, beggars, burglars and usurers were suppressed.* The result was that there was plenty of food, cattle and gold in the country and trade and industries were in a flourishing condition. In short, India acted upon the principle that nations require a political economy which supplies them food.

"The administration of justice under Hindu monarchy remained always separate from the executive, and generally independent in form and ever independent in spirit."† No price was fixed for seeking the aid of court, but a false claim or defence was penalised by a fine of five times the value of the claim. Deliberate perversity of judges was prevented, not only by the fear of public opinion, but also by liability to fine by the state. Thus, even the judges had no protection from the law.

Some of these features of administration continued to flourish even during the much-maligned Mohammadan period. In spite of

* For detailed study see Hindu Polity.

† Hindu Polity part II p. 152.

frequent wars between rival claimants to the throne, the life of the people ran its usual smooth course; agriculture, arts and industries continued to produce wealth, so much so that the fabulous gold of India attracted the attention of the young nations of the west,* of whose advent, Tagore sings thus:—

“When it was day they came into my house and said,
“We shall take the smallest room here.”

They said, “We shall help you in the worship of your
God

And humbly accept only our share of His grace.”

And they took their seat in a corner and sat there quiet
and meek

But, in the darkness of night, I find they break into
my sacred shrine

Strong and turbulent, and snatch with unholy greed
The offerings from God’s altar.†

This is what, in fact, many discerning orientals think the white man has brought to the brown, the yellow and the black man—robbery of his material wealth, the despoiling of his home, slavery, opium, death.

The average Indian rustic understands him when Gandhi interprets *Swaraj* as *Ram*

*As to India’s foreign trade see Moreland’s *India at the Death of Akbar*, Chap. VI.

†Gitanjali.

Rajya (the rule of Rama) and when he sees misery, poverty, disease and death around him, he feels that there is a wide gulf between *Ram Rajya* Gandhi is out to establish and the present system of government, of which he knows only the village choukidar, the patwari, and the Tehsil peon, his daily oppressors.

As to the method of non-violence advocated by Gandhi, he finds, it is blessed by his religion. Says the Mahabharat :

“Bear railing words with patience, never meet
An angry man with anger, nor return
Reviling for reviling, smite not him
Who smiteth thee, let thy speech and acts be gentle.”

He feels that so long as he is non-violent and adheres to truth at all costs, success is sure, a lesson he learns from the *Ramayan*—the most widely-read religious book, which even the illiterate hear recited. He recalls to memory the following passage from it :—

“Vibhishana became unbalanced on seeing Rama fighting without a chariot against Ravana who possessed one. His excess of affection for Rama made him doubtful of the result and, with an obeisance, he asked Rama as to how the latter would vanquish such a mighty foe without the advantage of a chariot or even shoes to cover the feet. Rama, the reservoir of mercy, replied :

"O friend, the chariot which gives victory is altogether different. Valour and fortitude are its wheels. Truth and character combine to make its mighty banner. Strength, discrimination, self-control and the service of humanity are its horses which are yoked to it by the strings of tolerance, kindness and equality. Devotion to God is the capable charioteer. Selflessness is the shield and contentment is the sword. Charity is the battle-axe and intelligence is the powerful missile. Knowledge serves as a strong bow. A pure and steady mind is the quiver and tranquility, restraint and regularity are the many arrows. The impenetrable armour is the worship of sages and *savants*. There is no better equipment for victory than this. With such a chariot of virtue, friend, a person has no enemy who cannot be vanquished."*

*रावण रथी विरथ रघुबारा, देखि विभोषण भयउ अधीरा ।
 अधिक प्रीति भा उर संदेहा, बंदि चरण कहि सहित सनेहा ।
 नाथ न रथ पद नहिं पदत्राणा, केहि विधि जितब वीर बलवाना ।
 सुनहु सखा कह कृपानिधाना, जेहि जय होइ सो स्यंदन आना ।
 शौरज धोर जाहि रथ चाका, सत्य शील दृढ़ ध्वजा पताका ।
 बल विवेक दम परहित धारे, क्षमा दया समता रजु जोरे ।
 ईश भजन सारथी सुजाना, विरति चर्म संतोष कृपाना ।
 दान परशु बुधि शक्ति प्रचंडा, वर विज्ञान कठिन कोदंडा ।
 संयम नियम शिलीमुख नाना, अमल अचल मन तूण समाना ।
 कबच अभेद्य विप्र पद पूजा, यहि सम बिजय उपाय न दूजा ।
 सखा धर्म मय असरथ जाके, जीत न कहं न कितुहुं रिपु ताके ।
 Ramayana, edited by P. Rameshwar Bhatt, Ean.

Thus, in the hands of Gandhi, the religious history of the race has become a means to bring God down out of the sky into daily life.

India's political history also provides the unique instance of a bloodless empire which flourished two hundred years before Christ. After Kalinga's bloody war, Asoka adopted a pacific policy and proved that even in the hard struggle of life and the maintenance of an Empire, bigger than British India, harmlessness and insistence upon truth was a bullet-proof combination sure to defeat the enemy.

The World War, too, did not play an unimportant part in preparing the field for Gandhi's work in Indian villages. The Indian villager's contact with the west on the battle-fields of Europe opened his eyes to the ferocity of modern civilisation that had hypnotised him into slavery. When he returned home, he returned with a yearning for liberty he had lost and contempt for Europe's thirst for blood he had witnessed. His evening talks round the village fire

prepared public opinion for a strenuous fight for liberty and a return to the essentially Indian doctrine of *ahimsa*—the living idealism of a tenacious people, whose gift is for enduring suffering and not for causing it. These returned soldiers were, so to say, John the Baptist in relation to the coming Christ, Gandhi. Gandhi is able today to control more millions than any living king or ruler, because he is the living example of the kindly Indian ideal of non-violence ingrained in the national fibre of India.

India has not yet attained complete Independence or even Dominion Status. Imperialism, through Churchill, has emphatically declared, that in spite of R. T. Conferences,

“Indian political classes are not going to be given Dominion status or responsible Government for all India in any period which, it is worth our while to consider. Something will intervene to save Britain and India from that frightful catastrophe.”*

“The loss of India, the central glory of the British Empire, will not only sound the death-knell of our greatness but destroy the means of livelihood of millions in this island, especially in Lancashire.”†

*The ‘Pioneer’ of 16th October, 1932.

†The ‘Leader’ of 20th April, 1932.

The Indian masses are today as steeped in illiteracy and abject poverty as ever during the last two centuries. The Congress, the only body which can express, excite or allay political agitation, it is claimed, is gripped by a series of Ordinances more drastic than any that were required since the Mutiny and its leaders are dispersed among the goals. Has, then, Gandhi failed to redeem his country? Is India today substantially the same as she was before Gandhi's advent? Is she the better or the worse for his activities?

Only about a decade ago, Montagu, than whom a more sympathetic and sincere Secretary of State for India has never occupied the *gaddi* of the Grand Moghal, declared that full responsible government and federation were far off dreams for India, not to be realised within a measurable distance of time; Lloyd George, in spite of his far-sighted idealism, was unable to envisage a time when the "steel-frame" that gripped India could be loosened. But today, England has admitted India's claim to be a self-governing federation and is devising a scheme for it. What England may actually concede

may fall short of India's demand, but the mere admission by England of India's right to full responsible government is a transformation brought about by Gandhi in a miraculously short spell of time.

India's poverty is not an easy problem to tackle. The figures of annual income *per capita* of different countries reveal that India stands at the bottom of the list. There is no country, except India, where this income does not run into three figures, in fact, well nigh into four, but the most exaggerated estimate for India is only Rs. 50. The reason is that the vast population of India is mainly rural and agricultural. Excessive fragmentation of holdings and enforced idleness, due both to the nature of Indian agriculture, which involves very hard work for certain short periods and almost complete inactivity for the rest of the year, and the want of any supplementary occupation, yield but a scanty living. All that private effort, unaided by the state, can do has been done by Gandhi. He has demonstrated to the starving rustic that the *charkha* can easily add an anna and a half per day to the two annas a day his

fight with the soil brings him. And sure enough, hand-spinning and hand-weaving, which brought untold wealth into the country, even in the early days of the East India Company, are reviving again. Upto 1925 there were no organisations and hardly any centres of *khadi*, last year there were no less than 6,348 active *khadi* centres in the country and a net-work of organisations behind them. It is supporting today nearly 8 to 10 million people and supplying about one-third of the clothing requirements of India.

The work of social emancipation Gandhi has done is tremendous. The impregnable fort of blind orthodoxy has crumbled to dust and from its ashes is rising a virile and stable social order based on the noblest and the healthiest traditions of the millenia. Hinduism has behind it. The spiritual brotherhood of man is the basis of this new-old order. It is moulding the body politic into that resplendent *Virat Purusha*, manifesting the four-fold *sine qua non* of life—spontaneous movement, metabolism reproduction and knowledge—the conception of which is the greatest gift of the ancient *Rshis* of India

to humanity, the conception of society as a living organism, guided by knowledge, protected by strength, nourished by wealth and sustained by labour.

Gandhi's title to be called redeemer is based, not on the shifting sands of political, economic and social regeneration of his countrymen, but on the solid rock of the silent, sudden, yet sure spiritual revolution, he has brought about. The virus of fear that ate into the very vitals of India, nurtured by centuries of crushing poverty, blighting ignorance and humiliating foreign rule, has vanished, like a phantom. The masses in India have lost all fear of death and of loss of possessions, the incubus that kept them down. That people court bullets, jail, fine and confiscation is proof positive of the fact that fatalistic resignation has given place to a confident aspiration, on which repression acts as an oxygen draught. People's eyes are opened to the iniquity of exploitation and one finds among Gandhi's collaborators industrial, banking and landed magnates, the erstwhile co-exploiters with the foreigner of the helplessness, poverty and

ignorance of the masses. The haves are realising their obligation to help the have-nots. Money, ever ready to flow in crores into the coffers of the Congress and allied organisations, in spite of the vigilance of the police and the rigorous enforcement of drastic executive fiat, is the voluntary penance imposed by the rich upon themselves for having exploited the poor. Gandhi has well and truly laid the foundation of the future of India, not, like the rebel-redeemers of the west, on the shaky ground of brute-force and expediency, but on the granite rock of non-violence and truth, embedded deep in eternity. In fact, he has laid bare before humanity, the sure foundation, so long buried under the ruins of time, on which it can build an abiding and glorious future and save itself from the cataclysm to which the modern mad rush after materialism is driving it fast.

In short, Gandhi has lifted his countrymen, many of whom were proud of being blotting-sheets of western civilization, from the meaningless momentary individualism they had imbibed from the west, to that significant, eternal

universalism which is the ancient heritage of India and which is now transforming the chaos and confusion of life to that pure and immortal essence which is its ideal possibility.

ॐ अभ्यस्त कर्मणं भद्रं ।

भद्रं भद्राभिलाषिणाम् ॥

ॐ शान्तिः !

ॐ शान्तिः !!

ॐ शान्तिः !!!

"Pure be those who are devoted to Action.

Pure be those who desire Purity."

PEACE !

PEACE !!

PEACE !!!

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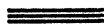
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